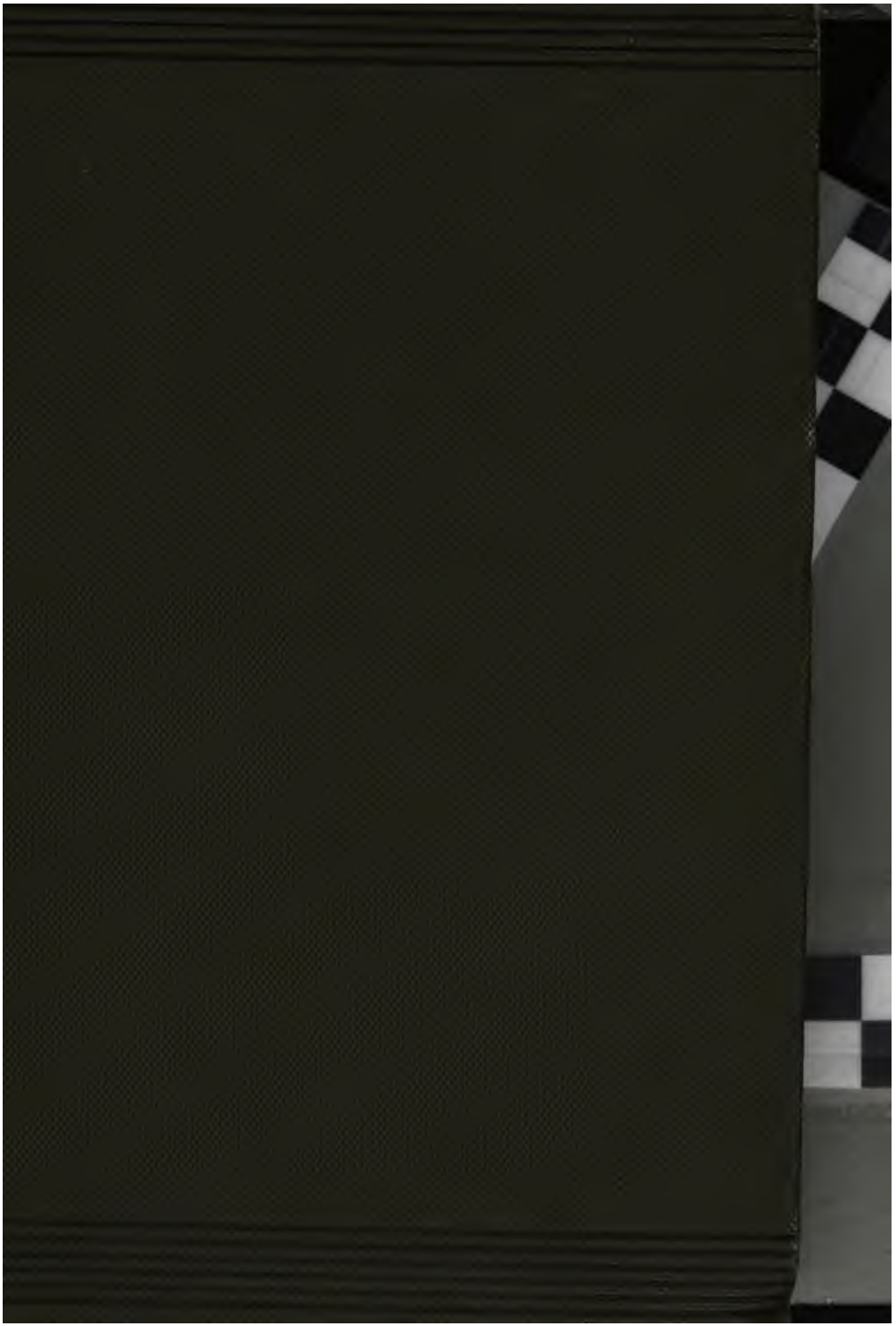

SOUTH AFRICAN SKETCHES.

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"WEST AFRICAN SKETCHES," "THE LAND OF FETISH," "THE HISTORY OF THE FIRST WEST INDIA REGIMENT," AND "WEST AFRICAN ISLANDS."

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LIMITED.

1887.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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SOUTH AFRICAN SKETCHES.

I.

A NIGHT'S DRIVE.

We had arrived at Karroo Poort at eight in the evening, after having crossed the sun-baked and dusty Karroo, with its hundreds upon hundreds of dry bones bleaching white by the roadside—the skeletons of oxen, mules, and horses, extending in an almost unbroken line all the way from Patatas River — and learned from the guard of the Transport Waggon the welcome intelligence that a halt of two hours would be allowed for supper.

It was our seventh day out from Du Toit's Pan, and, except for one pause of three hours at Richmond, and another of two hours at Murraysberg, we had had no halts longer than those necessary for a change of mule-teams, and a hurried meal here and there. We had

crossed five rivers, the Mod, the Riet, the Orange, the Salt, and the Bloed; had been jolted over *sluits* innumerable, drenched to the skin three times by thunder showers, and would, under all these circumstances, have felt somewhat tired even if we had been reclining in the most luxurious of travelling carriages. Our condition, therefore, may be well imagined when I say that this journey of several hundred miles had been performed in one of the waggons of the Diamond Fields Express Transport Company.

The conveyances of that company were seemingly designed for the purpose of providing the maximum of discomfort for the passenger at the minimum cost to the proprietors. They were four-wheeled and springless machines, covered with white canvas tilts, and contained five seats arranged across the waggon, one behind another. Of these seats four were inside the waggon, and the occupants faced the horses; one was behind, and faced the other way. The front seat was for the accommodation of the two drivers (one of whom wielded the mighty whip, while the other drove), and on each of the others, which were inside, were squeezed three unfortunate

passengers, wedged in on to the hard seat, with their elbows in each other's sides, unable to stretch out their legs on account of the seat directly in front of them, against which their knees pressed, and unable to lean back on account of the perpendicular and unyielding back. The fifth seat, outside behind, accommodated two passengers and the guard of the waggon, and to the occupants of that seat fell more than their fair share of the jerks, bumps, and blows which were inseparable from express travelling; while, unless they held tight when crossing a *sluit*, they were almost certain to find themselves covered with dust and rubbing their bruised backs in the road, with the waggon two or three hundred yards off going along at full speed. To get in or out of the waggon, one had either to climb in at the front or back; there was no door at the side.

You who complain of a railway journey of twelve or fourteen hours in a padded and cushioned first-class railway carriage, think of how you would like to undertake a journey of nine hundred miles, occupying from eight to eleven days, in such a conveyance. The passenger was only allowed to carry 30 lbs.

of luggage; during the entire journey he was unable to take off his clothes or boots for more than an hour or so, opportunities for washing there were none; and dirty, unshaven, a prey to flies and fleas, drenched with perspiration, and coated thickly with red dust, he sat with stiffened limbs, sleepless, bruised, and tired to death. In fact, many men broke down under the ordeal, and had to be left at the farm-house of some wayside Boer, to recover as best they might, and continue their journey when an opportunity offered; while nearly all suffered from swollen ankles, and abrasion of the dorsal cuticle.

We alighted from the waggon in front of the low house of sun-dried bricks, which stood to the right of the road in the ravine, which is known as Karroo Poort; and stamped and stretched our cramped and benumbed limbs. Behind us lay the dead and bare level of the Karroo, with its odours of putrefying carcases, and its blinding storms of dust; in front, the mountains which form the southern boundary of the plateau of the Karroo, loomed up darkly in the failing light of evening, and a cold wind swept down the gorge, tossing the broad leaves of the fig-trees around the house, and sighing

and rustling through a field of maize which stretched away along the foot of the mountain. This cold blast springing up so suddenly after the sultry summer day, for the month was December, seemed to bear to each of us a new lease of life; and we threw open our grimy shirts and stood facing the breeze, drinking it in greedily, and removing our tattered soft felt hats to allow the cool wave of air to bathe our dusty heads and faces.

Karroo Poort was one of the regular halting-places of the Transport Company, and here the span of ten mules which had brought us from Patatas River was to be replaced by one of eight horses to take us through the pass known as Hottentot's Kloof, to the town of Ceres. Hottentot's Kloof was considered to be the most dangerous of the three mountain passes traversed in the journey from Cape Town to the Diamond Fields, for the road made many sudden turns round precipitous spurs, having on the one hand an abrupt and stony height, and on the other a yawning gulf, and the brink of the declivity was not protected by boulders of rock, as is the case in Baines' Kloof and Mitchell's Pass. Accidents were not unfrequent, and

the shattered remains of two or three post-carts and waggons with the skeletons of their teams, far down amongst the wild confusion of rocks which formed the bed of the ravine, were always pointed out to passengers by the guards in order to quiet their apprehensions and make them feel quite satisfied as to their safety.

At a call from the guard we lounged wearily into the scantily-furnished room in which the supper had been laid. The usual way-side meal of greasy mutton-chops floating about in a liquid sea of sheep-tail fat, accompanied by the customary sour bread and thick coffee, was displayed before us, and we sank despondently into the rough chairs which were set round the table. About two mouthfuls were sufficient for me, for I was too tired to eat, and lighting a pipe I strolled outside into the cool air, and stretched myself at full length upon the softest piece of ground I could find.

I can still remember the gratified sense of relief I experienced at being at last able to stretch my legs out at full length, after having sat with them doubled up—and they are not by any means short—for nearly ten

hours, for I was nearly done up with fatigue and want of sleep. It was the 28th of December, and with the exception of a doze of about an hour and a half, on the night of the 26th, at the farm of Uit Kik (Look Out), where we had been delayed to repair some injury to one of the wheels of the waggon, and where the Boer showed us a wondrous nugget which he told us he had found on his farm, I had had no sleep since the early morning of Christmas Day, when we left Murraysberg. The other passengers were able to snatch short intervals of sleep between the ruder bumps and crashes of the waggon over the *sluits;* but so far I had been unable to do so, sleepy though I was, and every swing and jerk that brought my tired body into rough contact with some of the wood-work of the waggon, made me painfully conscious that I was wide awake. I sprawled out then on the ground luxuriously, determined to get at least an hour's rest before again starting. The night was quite dark, a few stars were peeping from the dark vault overhead, the cool breeze murmured a lullaby amongst the long streamers and feathery plumes of the maize, and, with a calm sense of beatified contentment, I fell fast asleep.

It seemed to me as if I had only been sleeping for a moment, when I was awakened by being roughly shaken, and by a voice shouting into my ear that all the passengers were on board, and that the waggon was about to start. I scrambled to my feet, rubbed my eyes, and clambered up into my place; and the next moment, with much cracking of whip, objurgation of cattle, and blowing of the guard's bugle, we were off.

Fortunately, when booking my seat at Du Toit's Pan, I had been sufficiently early to engage an inside seat, and that one an end one, so that I was only wedged on one side by a fellow-sufferer, and could lean against the side of the tilt. Next to me, on my right, was an individual whose face was still smeared with the blood which had been drawn in a personal conflict in which he had been engaged with another passenger the day before at Riet Fontein, where we had stopped for breakfast. Next to him again, on the same seat, was a gentleman of Hebrew nationality, who carried with him a small leathern bag, which was popularly believed by the community of the waggon to contain diamonds to a fabulous amount. Before me, on the seat

in front, was a digger in a greasy red flannel shirt, and a pair of moleskin trousers, and who had so little regard for personal cleanliness and public prejudices, that troops of live stock, of a kind not mentionable to ears polite, could be seen grazing precariously over the mud and dust which coated his head and neck. Next to him were two phlegmatic Dutchmen, who did nothing all day but smoke villainous Boer tobacco in green-stone pipes, and eat morsels of *biltonge*, or jerked meat, with their sheath-knives. On the seat in front of these were two diggers, slightly cleaner to the outward eye than the others, and a Scotch trader, who had been vainly trying to induce the other occupants of the waggon to buy a watch, ever since we had left Jacobsdaal. On the seat behind mine were three Australian diggers, quiet, inoffensive, and temperate men, who had made their "pile" at the "Fields," and were now about to leave the country.

My neighbour on my right hand had been endeavouring to drown the recollection of his recent defeat in copious libations of "Cape Smoke," and swayed from side to side with every jolt of the waggon, now falling heavily against me, and now upon the Hebrew on his

right. After every one of these subsidences, he would pull himself together, and looking at whichever one of us he had just escaped crushing, would ask with drunken gravity, "What the blank we meant by shoving him?" Then he would grumble to himself for a few minutes, till another jolt disturbed his equilibrium. After this had gone on for a quarter of an hour or so, his mood changed, and he broke out into a burst of drunken song, in a rich, mellow voice that was heard high above the clatter of the horses' hoofs, and the rattle and crash of the waggon. All this, of course, was not conducive to sleep, and I wanted to continue the slumber, which I had, so to speak, only just commenced to taste at Karroo Poort; but I was too lazy to be seriously angry with the man, so, beyond wishing to myself that I could kill him quietly and be at rest, I did nothing; and the waggon rolled on, jolting over stones and ruts, now in the dark shadow of some towering height, and now in the pale and calm light of the stars.

Presently it seemed to me as if my neighbour's song took the measured rhythm of the stroke of a driving-wheel. Yes, that is it: I am in a train. What a delightful change from

the hard seats of that accursed waggon in which I was so lately! How soft and luxurious these seats are! What pretty country this is! Look at that brook meandering amongst the rushes in that field beyond that copse. I should think that was a good place for trout. Now I can stretch out my legs. But what is that sickening smell of burnt tallow? Phew, it is nauseating.

Hullo! that infernal Boer has put that dish of mutton-chops on the top of the canvas bag containing my only change of clothes. I must move it or it will topple over and spoil my things. Yes, I must move it. What a nuisance to have to get up when I am so comfortably settled! Strange! I feel as if I couldn't move. What is it? Oh, I see; I am tied to the seat, and that Boer, who was so sulky because I did not seem to appreciate his supper, is going to feed me with that iron ladle. That is why the chops are here. What a queer kind of ladle it is he has! It seems to have two bowls. No, it is not a ladle at all, it is an anchor; and that is not the Boer, it is the captain of the steamer, for I am on board a steamer. Good heavens! what a sea is running! How the good ship climbs up that immense wave, and here we go

sliding down, down, down in the trough of the sea. Don't you hear the screw racing as it pitches clear of the water? Now we are rolling. I hate rolling—I shall be sea-sick presently. Crash—there's a boat carried away. What? What did you say, captain? Rather choppy sea? Oh! yes, very choppy. How those waves come towering on! Here we go up, up—the bowsprit will knock a star out of place presently. Now we go down again. Ah! what a slide! Is this a south-easter, I wonder, or what? . . . .

Dear me, how calm it has become all of a sudden! And why is that canoe full of cannibals coming here from that low island over there with the cocoa-nut palms on it? Ah! I understand; they have scented the mutton-chops, even at that distance, and I know they are cannibals by their long tusks. What wonderful keenness of smell! Talk of vultures scenting out their prey—that is nothing to this. The sound of those tom-toms they are playing is not unpleasant. They are playing the chorus from Masaniello, and the head chief is conducting. Very good indeed. Now they are alongside. Where are the crew of the ship? Get out your cutlasses quick, or you will be too late. Look!

some of them are disguised in green veils and women's hats, and one is playing on a fiddle. I have seen that before in a picture somewhere, I think. Here they come, up the side, and—merciful Heavens! I am tied again, bound fast to this stanchion. Oh! what a fate, to be entombed in the stomachs of a score of cannibals! Let go of me, I am not good to eat. I smoke too much: I shall taste bitter. Help!

And as the chief cannibal seized me by the arm I struggled to get free, and, opening my eyes, found myself being gently shaken by one of the Hottentot drivers. To my astonishment the waggon was standing still, and was quite empty. I looked out, and saw by the light of the moon, which had risen since we had left Karroo Poort, that we were in the street of a town, the white buildings of which gleamed in the moonlight.

"Where are we?" I gasped.

"Ceres, *baas*. See de hotel dar."

"Ceres? Hotel? And where are the other passengers?"

"Leff back in de Kloof."

"What for?"

"Why, *baas*, de drag him broke, as we

came down from de Neck, and de horses run 'way, and all de gen'lemen, and de guard, and de oder Tottie, dey jump out at de back. Only me and you leff."

"Good heavens!" I thought. "And I have been sleeping here like an unconscious innocent, while this heavy waggon has been thundering and blundering down that break-neck pass, behind eight runaway horses!"

What an escape! I could picture to myself the waggon skidding upon two wheels along the edges of precipices, round the sharp turns of the road, and jumping over *sluits* and crashing against loose rocks, now swaying half over a ravine and now glancing from the stony face of a cliff. Then I laughed at the idea of all the other passengers struggling to the back of the waggon in a wild rush to get out, squeezing, shoving, pulling, and cursing and swearing in their fright; holding on to the back seat and dropping into the road, bruised, dust-covered, and with torn clothes; all in such a hurry to save their necks that they never gave a thought to me; and I chuckled as I thought of the long walk they had now before them, and how I had unconsciously scored off them. That their exit had been impromptu

and hasty, the hats, bags, and pipes that were scattered about the waggon clearly showed; one fugitive had left his boots behind in his flight, and I felt certain that they had spent a very bad five minutes fighting their way out over the seats.

As I got out of the waggon I saw a man approaching whom I recognised as the proprietor of the hotel. He grasped me eagerly by the hand, shook it with demonstrative warmth, and ejaculated:

"Well, you must be a good plucked 'un to have stuck to it like that."

"Why?" said I.

"Why? You ask me why? You are a stranger to these parts, maybe; but if you'd a known as many accidents in that Kloof as I've a known, and if you'd been up and down that Kloof as often as I've been, and knew the road as I know it, you'd say with me it's most a miracle your being here now."

"But there's nothing much in my sticking to the waggon—the driver stuck to it."

"That's as may be; but he was on the front seat, and could chuck himself off if he see her a-going over. But how was you a-going to get out?"

"Well, the fact is, I was asleep the whole time, and knew nothing about it."

"Jee—hosaphat!" he whistled. "You must be a sound sleeper. And all your pards hurried out o' the back without ever troubling to give you a call?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, you've got the laugh of them this time, anyhow. They can't get here now much before mid-day. They've got a goodish piece of footing before them."

"Then I've got about five or six hours to wait?"

"That's so."

"And you can give me a bed?"

"You bet. As many as you like."

"Then give me one."

And so I had a good long sleep at last.

II.

THE LEGEND OF THE PORTUGUESE RUINS.

THE Boer Hendrick van Swieten was a proud man. Pride, indeed, is a quality in which the inhabitants of South Africa who are of Dutch origin are not usually deficient, and Hendrick was in this matter no exception. Like most of his compatriots he was a sheep-farmer, and he owned a vast tract of land in the diamondiferous territory of South Africa, that is to say, in that portion of the continent lying between the Orange and Vaal Rivers. Title-deeds to his estate he had none. He had, as a matter of course, on the decease of his father, continued in the occupation and taken over the management of the farm, which his father had, after the manner of Boers, simply taken unto himself without requesting permission from any one. In the eyes of the greater number of the Boers

the aboriginal inhabitants of South Africa are mere animals who have no right to possessions of any kind; many of them go so far as to think that they have no right even to exist, and the suggestion that they might perhaps have some title to the soil would be received with a blank stare of utter amazement.

Van Swieten was especially vain of his pure Dutch descent, and boasted that no base English blood flowed in his veins. Over the chimney-piece in the parlour of his farm-house, his framed and illuminated pedigree, rapidly becoming smoke-grimed through the obstinacy of the prevailing wind or the eccentricity of the chimney, at once attracted the attention of visitors. Van Swieten used to say that it was longer than that of any other man in South Africa; and that the framed samplers, worked by female members of the family who had long since been gathered to their fathers in the red-brick vault which stood opposite the front door of the house, were older, uglier, and worse done than any others in the colony. This was a great mark of respectability. He moreover stated himself to be a direct lineal descendant of the great Van Swieten, a philanthropist who had accompanied William Prince of Orange

to England, and had there, entirely in the interests of humanity, taken charge of various estates, the owners of which had been on the losing side in the Revolution.

The English had, at the capture of the Cape of Good Hope in 1806, ousted Hendrick's grandfather from his comfortable homestead at Stellenbosch, carrying their hostility towards him so far as to kill him in the skirmish of Blawberg Bay; and an autograph letter of General Janssens', who commanded the Dutch forces, written to the bereaved widow to inform her of the melancholy but heroic fate of her husband, was still carefully preserved in the Van Swieten farm-house as a priceless relic. The father of Hendrick van Swieten, on finding himself thus suddenly elevated to the post of head of the family, acted as became a Dutch philosopher. He comforted himself with the reflection that his illustrious ancestor had, in company with William III., conquered England, and now that the English had, in their turn, captured the Cape, it was only one of those natural changes in the course of events by means of which the balance of power between powerful nations is preserved. He remembered that Africa was large, and that the territory to

the north of the Orange River was not claimed by Europeans of any nation; so, collecting his household goods, he *trekked* northwards in two ox-waggons, and finally settled down in that tract of country which was later known as Waterboer's Territory, and is now denominated Griqualand West. There was no absolute necessity for this migratory movement. The English had, with a sublime indifference to their rights as conquerors, neither confiscated the lands nor molested the persons of those who had resisted them by force of arms; but Van Swieten could not even brook the vicinity of Englishmen, so he sold his Stellenbosch property, shook the dust from off his feet, and went northward in search of independence.

The Boers of South Africa are a simple people, and their wants are few. Living as they do in isolated houses scattered at rare intervals over a vast expanse of country, new ideas are transmitted but slowly, and penetrate still more sluggishly. The world and its doings are matters which interest them but little, of fashion they know and care nothing, and battles which might change the destinies of more than one European nation, could be lost and won without more than a vague rumour reaching

the ears of the up-country Boer. In matters of cleanliness and sanitation, they are as much behind the age as they are in politics and progress. They have a childish abhorrence of the external application of cold water, which, perhaps, in a country where water is so scarce, may be a fortunate circumstance; and the household refuse is scattered round the house in such a way as to be offensive to the olfactory nerves of the less primitive denizens of towns. They are patriarchal in their habits, and not unfrequently the entire family — father and mother, sons, daughters, and daughters-in-law—sleep in one room. Should the water near the house dry up in the summer, they do not object to living in a waggon for a few months; moving off with their flocks to some spot where water may still be found, and returning to the farm with the first rains. They have a wholesome contempt for literature, the arts, and the sciences. Most of them are able to spell through a chapter of their old-fashioned Bibles, and to scrawl their names at the foot of a document; but beyond these their accomplishments are few. They are, in fact, ideal Conservatives, and neither want to know more than their fathers knew, nor to live in any way better than their fathers

lived. They have not yet caught the infection of those terrible radical diseases, improvement and progress.

Hendrick van Swieten was hardly so philosophic as his late father had been, and he indulged in an unmitigated hatred of England and of everything that was English. He exhibited this feeling in the minutest details of his life. The stubbornest and worst-tempered ox in his team was always called "Englishman," and if any disease broke out among his sheep he was certain to attribute it to something the English had done. He was not a whit more reasonable than the Irish at the time of a potato famine.

His residence could hardly be described as palatial. It was built of rough, sun-dried bricks, had a flat roof, and boasted two apartments. One was called the parlour. It contained a rough wooden table, a bench, and some chairs, with straight backs. It was further adorned with the pedigree and samplers, a few plates and dishes placed in racks, and an old delf tea-pot, which stood on the mantel-shelf above the enormous Dutch fire-place, and which served as the family strong box; for Hendrick, in common with most of his countrymen, had no faith in banks, and the hard cash which he

received in payment for his wool and fleeces, was invariably placed in this unsuspected receptacle. A black and smoky-looking press, which stood in one corner with a leg raised in the air through the inequalities in the smooth floor of plastered dung, contained the few spare articles of wearing apparel comprised in the family wardrobe. The other room was the sleeping apartment, which had never been profaned by the presence of any Englishman; nor, indeed, had any individual of that nation ever been heard to express a wish to trespass on that dark interior.

The cooking of the family was all carried on in the open air; a circular mud wall forming the kitchen, and a mud oven the stove. Close at hand was a pool of muddy-brown rain-water, on which the Van Swietens entirely depended for their supply of that fluid; for there was no spring on the farm, and the Vaal River was some twenty miles distant. Near to the kitchen a stunted fig-tree and a hedge of dissipated-looking pomegranates watched over a patch of withering cabbages and a bank of sweet-potatoes. The view could scarcely be called picturesque, for, with the exception of the fig-tree and the pomegranates, the eye might

search for miles in every direction without anywhere discovering a shrub of a greater height than two feet. Trees there were none. It was a vast, dreary plain, stretching far away into the horizon, covered with loose red-ochre-coloured stones and stunted rhinoster bushes.

As for Van Swieten himself, he was a stout, red-faced, blue-eyed, sandy-bearded man, attired in a dirty brown moleskin coat and trousers. His neck and chest were bare, and tanned by the sun to a brick-red hue. He was rather given to sitting for hours on the narrow *stoep* outside his house, steadfastly regarding the red-brick mausoleum in front of him, and exhaling clouds of smoke from his huge earthenware pipe. He preferred this sort of thing to exercise, and was supposed to be a deep thinker, but he rarely gave mankind the benefit of his reflections.

The Van Swietens were thus located in Waterboer's Territory some years before the discovery of diamonds in South Africa. It was before the never-to-be-forgotten diamond was found sticking in the plaster of the only house at Bultfontein, and the excited inhabitants stripped the walls in the hope of finding more.

The Vaal then flowed on placidly between its willow-fringed banks at Klipdrift and Pniel, undisturbed by the stir and bustle of eager men, and the virgin soil had not been awakened from its long sleep by the rude spade of the digger. De Beers, afterwards called the New Rush and still later known as Kimberley, and Du Toit's Pan were bare, silent, and deserted, and the very names unknown beyond the small circle of Boers who lived in the immediate neighbourhood.

There stood then, as there stands now, to the right of the road and about half-way between Pniel and the New Rush, a ruined building, the origin of which is involved in obscurity. The Boers are not much given to antiquarian researches, and probably never troubled themselves to think at all about this ruin, except with a view to avoiding it, for they are a superstitious people, and people all such old buildings in imagination with their *spoeks*, or ghosts. The arched vaults and the remains of a square tower are evidently architectural works superior in kind to any attempted by the Dutch in South Africa; and the building is supposed to have been, anterior to the Dutch colonisation of the Cape, a Portuguese military

post, kept up for the purposes of the slave trade.

One sultry evening in the early part of November (year uncertain), Hendrick van Swieten might have been discerned leaving the bend of the Vaal River, where the tent, known as the Quarter Way House Hotel, stood in later years, and striking into the plain on his homeward way. He had been on an excursion to the Vaal River to pay a visit to a neighbouring Boer, and in a country where your next-door neighbour is perhaps twenty miles off, men think nothing of passing a day in the saddle. He was mounted on a rough, ungroomed Cape horse, wiry and sure of foot, that could get over a great deal of rough and stony ground in a day, and was going along at a hand-gallop, for he did not at all like the threatening appearance of the sky. In fact, one of those severe and dangerous thunderstorms which occur so frequently on the inland plateaus of South Africa, and which are perhaps unrivalled in any part of the world, was evidently close at hand. Right ahead, in the very direction in which he was going, a dark, dense bank of clouds obscured the horizon, with forked, zigzag streaks of vivid light momentarily darting

down upon the earth from its midst. The low growl of the thunder was audible in the distance, growing louder with every minute, for the storm was approaching Van Swieten with marvellous rapidity. He looked to the right: in that direction, but a little to his front, was another black thunder-cloud, also approaching. "*Die duyvel*," he muttered, as he lifted his nag with his knees and pressed on.

One of those storms so common in South Africa when two or three distinct thunder-clouds meet was now coming on; and the two clouds were rapidly converging together, to meet at a point right in the very path of the unlucky Van Swieten. As yet no rain had fallen; but the gusts of cold wind which now struck him in the face, and the strange, damp smell of the air, told him that it was not far distant. A tremendous peal of thunder now resounded, and a sharp blast of wind careered over the plain, driving before it a whirlwind of dust and leaves. Van Swieten saw the dense yellow cloud approaching, and ducked his head; for a moment the air around him was thick with dust and grit, then it swept by, and almost immediately after the rain fell in torrents. Before many minutes had passed the thirsty plain, over which one short ten minutes

before one might have vainly searched for miles for a drop of water, was dotted with pools, and streams of turbulent red water were foaming down from every low crest in the undulation. The storm was now immediately overhead, and at its height; added to which it was rapidly becoming dark. A low mound, covered with large boulders of ironstone, lay to the left of the track, and Hendrick was hurrying past this more elevated part as fast as he could make his horse go, and debating within himself whether it would not be wiser for him to dismount and walk, when a sudden sheet of vivid white light that seemed to spring from all sides nearly deprived him of sight, and simultaneously a peal, like the sharp crack of a thousand rifles, sounded above and around him. The horse, blinded and scared by the lightning, shied to one side, and Van Swieten in his confusion found himself sprawling on the ground. He was about to utter his usual ejaculation, "*Die duyvel*," when he remembered that as the storm was still raging it was hardly a suitable time to invoke a demon who was supposed to be antagonistic to the handler of the lightning, and he abruptly closed his lips. He rose carefully, feeling every limb to ascertain if it were

damaged by the fall or by the lightning, for a rock close beside him had been shivered by the stroke, and finding himself uninjured he looked around for his horse. But in vain. The gathering gloom of the evening and the sheets of falling rain effectually prevented him seeing far in any direction, and he could discover nothing of the missing animal. He whistled and shouted, but it was of no use; his horse had evidently taken leave. He was standing still, looking out into the watery plain, and not at all relishing the idea of the long tramp to his house on such a night, when a vivid flash of lightning suddenly disclosed to him for a second a building some three hundred yards distant. He ran towards it; as he drew nearer another flash again lit up the gloomy scene, and he at once recognised the square tower and the dilapidated arches of the Portuguese ruins.

Hendrick van Swieten was not more superstitious than the majority of his fellow countrymen, yet his first impulse, on finding himself in such close proximity to this lonely building, was to take to his heels in the opposite direction. A moment's reflection, however, decided him to take advantage of the shelter thus unexpectedly offered him. He was many miles from home;

it was dark, and he might easily lose his way; moreover, it was dangerous to remain on that bare plain the only prominent object for the lightning to aim at within miles; he had just had a narrow escape, and next time he might not be so fortunate. Taking all this into consideration he plucked up courage, and, feeling very much as if some unexpected horror were about to clutch him by the back of the neck, he entered the ruined tower.

The building was roofless, but in one angle, sheltered from the rain, he found the corner of a vault, with a portion of the arched roof still remaining. Into this he crept, placing his back against the wall, determined that at all events, nothing should come at him from behind; and, making himself as comfortable as he could under the circumstances, he lighted his pipe, and remained smoking and listening to the sough of the rain, and the distant artillery of the rapidly-retreating thunder. The night was as dark as pitch, and every flash of lightning lighted up the vast rain-covered plain, seen through the ragged gateway of the old tower, which formed a weird frame to the dispiriting picture. After a time the measured beat of the rain and the soothing

fumes of the tobacco appeared to have a somniferous effect on Van Swieten. Gradually his head nodded lower and lower till it sank upon his knees, then his pipe slipped from his relaxing grasp, and he fell asleep.

What the hour was when he awoke he knew not, but he thought it must be about midnight, and he felt cold and stiff from sleeping in his wet clothes, and in so cramped a position. The rain had ceased, and a deathly stillness, unbroken save by the occasional distant yelp of a jackal, reigned over the earth. There was no moon, but the stars were shining in the dark vault of the heavens, looking down through the roofless top of the tower, and Van Swieten had already risen to his feet, and was stretching himself preparatory to leaving his shelter, and striking across the plain towards his home, when he was startled and horrified at perceiving the dusky figure of a man moving about just outside the ruined arch of the tower. He trembled in his *veldtschoens*, and crouched back close to the wall. The figure came nearer, and accustomed as he was to distinguish objects in the dark, he at once made out the outline of a native, perhaps Kaffir or Hottentot. Never having heard of

a black ghost, he felt immensely relieved, and was about to call out to the intruder, when he reflected that the man before him might be a Bushman; he thought of the poisoned arrows and held his tongue. Presently the figure moved behind the ruined wall, and disappeared from sight.

Hendrick wished over and over again that he was in his own farm-house, snugly ensconced for the night, and he made a mental vow that he would never pay such a long visit again, or, at all events, not leave his host's dwelling so late in the day. Once or twice he thought of making a bolt for it, and of rushing out of the vault on to the plain; but again and again he put off the moment for starting. While he was thus still debating within himself, he was alarmed at perceiving a number of people in front of him, standing under the gateway of the tower. His flesh crept, the hair bristled on his head, and he broke out into a clammy perspiration. There could be no doubt about it, these new-comers must be ghosts.

These people were attired in the most extraordinary manner, in dresses the like of which Van Swieten had never seen. They

all had broad-brimmed felt hats, adorned with ostrich feathers, tight-fitting doublets, slashed and puffed at the shoulders, tight-fitting trousers, and long, wide-topped boots. Who could they be? They wore moustaches and pointed beards; all carried straight swords, and some of them had the most appalling-looking blunderbusses that he had ever seen. They reminded him somehow of his illustrious ancestor who had helped to conquer England, and of whom traditionary and oral portraits had been handed down from generation to generation in the family. Van Swieten noticed that they all looked as if they were suffering from ill-health, they were so pale; but then, on second thoughts, he remembered that all the ghosts he had ever heard of had been remarkable for their pallor, so that these gentlemen appeared to be strictly *en règle*. They lounged about and walked to and fro, but not a sound, not a footstep could Van Swieten distinguish.

Presently he saw the native, whom he had imagined to be a Bushman, reappear. He saw him go up to the two men who wore the longest ostrich feathers in their hats, shake hands with them affably, gesticulate, and sit down. Then he perceived a bottle which

began to circulate freely between these three, and he commenced to think that after all the ghost business might not be such a bad one, since these seemed to have an unlimited supply of Schiedam at their disposal. He would not have objected to a little himself just then, he was so cold, but he felt an unusual delicacy about asking these strangers for it. Soon the earthly spirit appeared to be producing a curious effect upon the unearthly one in the semblance of a native, for he reeled about in a manner that was highly reprehensible for a respectable ghost, and Van Swieten felt sure that had he spoken he would have found some difficulty about his clicks. After a time he staggered away, and beckoning to the pale persons in the strange garments, led the way to another part of the building where the ruined walls concealed them from sight.

No sooner had the last of them disappeared round the crumbling wall of the tower, than Van Swieten, with a cat-like tread, noiselessly left his hiding-place, and skulking along in the shadow of the old walls, moved out of the ruins. He was creeping past the front of the building, stooping down so as to escape observation, when a bright gleam of light

suddenly shone through a dilapidated casement immediately in front of him, and, moved by an irresistible spirit of curiosity, he slowly raised himself and peeped in.

He at once saw that he was looking upon the ancient courtyard. The strangers with the fear-compelling blunderbusses and swords were grouped round an old-fashioned brazier which stood in the centre of the court, and which flamed and flickered with an unearthly glare, giving forth at the same time fumes that were unmistakably sulphurous. At first Van Swieten thought that, feeling cold from the sudden change of temperature to which they had been exposed in their passage from the regions below to earth, they were endeavouring to warm themselves; but, on looking more closely, he perceived some curiously-shaped irons heating in the fire, but for what purpose he could not imagine. The mystery was, however, at once solved. He saw the inebriated native emerge from a ruined dungeon in one corner of the yard, bringing with him a long cavalcade of people, men, women, and children. He noticed that these latest arrivals appeared to have a strange taste for heavy jewellery about the wrists and ankles; he looked again and

saw that they were fetters. It was all clear to him then. These must be the spirits of departed slave-dealers, who, for their misdeeds, were compelled to act the horrid scene over again. The intoxicated native marched his procession of human wares up to the brazier in couples. Then the two men who had the most ragged ostrich feathers in their hats threw the slaves on the ground, took each a hot iron from the fire and pressed it fizzing upon a quivering shoulder, where it left a mark that glowed like molten iron. This process was repeated some six or seven times, and each time that the brand was printed on a slave, fresh fumes of sulphur pervaded the court. A puff of wind carried the sulphurous smoke towards Van Swieten, the smell became intolerable, and he felt that he must cough. He gasped for breath, the veins stood out on his temples, and he grew purple in the face in his endeavours to restrain himself. He crammed the skirts of his coat into his mouth to deaden the sound, but in vain.

Had a shell fallen among the group inside the ruins, they could not have appeared more startled than they did upon hearing that unfortunate explosion of Van Swieten's.

"Diavolo," said the man in the largest hat.

Van Swieten looked up, and perceived the bell-mouthed muzzle of a death-dealing blunderbuss looking him straight in the face. In an instant he threw himself at full length behind the wall. A terrific crash sounded in his ears, the ruined wall tottered and fell, and he was covered with the stones and *débris*, and half smothered by the lime-dust which rose from the crumbled mortar. He lay motionless and silent for some time, not daring to move or utter a sound; but at last, hearing nothing more, he ventured to crawl from under the mass of rubbish which covered him. He peeped into the court; the light was extinct, and the lonely ruins were as silent as the grave.

When Van Swieten reached home next morning, the foregoing is the account which he gave. His family received him with open arms, believed and comforted him. He imposed secrecy upon his household. Rash man, but little versed in the peculiarities of the fair sex! The adventure itself was so strange that they were naturally dying to tell it to some of their neighbours, and to demand

secrecy was only to make them burn to tell it the more. Thus, before a week was over, everybody within a radius of thirty miles had heard of Hendrick's story.

A few of his neighbours believed it, but the majority shook their heads knowingly, and said that if Van Swieten had slept in the ruins at all (which they doubted), he had most probably been disturbed by a troop of dog-headed baboons, and that the obscurity of the night, and his excited imagination, had conjured up the rest. Moreover, the friend, whose house Van Swieten had left before meeting with this astounding adventure, said that he had noticed that Hendrick's condition on parting was not that which a strict observance of sobriety would entail.

But such is the legend of the Portuguese Ruins.

III.

PIET.

My boy Piet was not handsome. Indeed, to European ideas, his small eyes set obliquely in his face; his wide and flat nose with its distorted nostrils, and the bridge so little elevated that the space between the cheek-bones was almost flat; his protruding lips, and long and prominent, but narrow and pointed chin, might appear positively ugly, notwithstanding the verdicts of the various Hottentot belles with whom he was on familiar terms, and who evidently regarded him with approving eyes.

He was a pure Hottentot, of a type now almost extinct; for though, about two hundred and thirty years ago, when Van Riebeck was Dutch Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, the Hottentots proper numbered more than two hundred thousand, internecine warfare so thinned their numbers, and the survivors

subsequently intermarried to such an extent with Malays, Kaffirs, Half-castes, and Europeans, that, strictly speaking, they have long ceased to exist as a tribe. The varieties of the Hottentot proper—that is, the Korannas, the Namaquas, the Griquas, and the Bushmen—live and thrive, but the parental stock bids fair soon to be as utterly extinct as the dodo.

Piet was not hirsute. He had sprouting, at rare intervals on his upper lip, a few hairs, the number of which would not increase if he lived to be a hundred years old; and on his head the small black tufts of wool were sprinkled so sparingly as to permit of a small circle of scalp being perceived around each. His vicinity was unpleasant to the olfactory nerves—he was still less partial to the outward application of water than to the inward—but he was faithful; tolerably honest, except in matters in which food, drink, or money were concerned; less of a drunkard than most of his compatriots; and a liar of but small capacity. He was about five feet four inches in height, and of a jaundiced yellow hue. His age amounted to about sixteen years in actual time; but he appeared to be at least a century old in wickedness and depravity.

He called himself a Dutch Lutheran ; but I do not believe he had ever entered a church in his life, and he paid no more attention to the ritual of that creed than he did to its moral precepts. Large-minded and free from bias, however, as he seemed to be upon the subject of religion, I observed that whenever he chanced to come upon a "praying mantis," the insect which his ancestors used to receive with the highest tokens of veneration and welcome as a god, he approached it with a certain amount of deference. He was too civilised, or too sceptical about all things supernatural, to sing and dance round it, as did his benighted progenitors, and he would no more have thought of sprinkling our tent with the powder of the "buchu" in its honour, than he would have of sacrificing two sheep to it ; unless they were sheep belonging to some other person, and then only with a view to a snake-like gorge. Still, he half believed that the advent of the mantis was indicative of future prosperity, and he would not have treated it with disrespect for fear of bringing ill-luck upon himself.

My acquaintance with Piet began curiously. He was one of the drivers of the Diamond Fields transport waggons, and was employed

on a stage between Victoria West and Hopetown. He came to us at a farm, some ten hours' journey from the former town, with a span of twelve half-starved mules, which were so wretchedly bad that he and the other driver had to take it in turns to run alongside them and keep them moving by a vigorous application of "sjambok." He would jump out and administer a couple of stinging cuts to each mule, and then, as they broke into a trot, he would spring on to the waggon again. He did this very cleverly some five or six times; but he tried it once too often, and, missing his footing, fell under the waggon, so that the heavy wheels passed over an ankle and crushed it. We of course stopped, lifted him into the waggon, bandaged his ankle with strips of rag damped with "Cape Smoke" and water taken from the collective flasks of the passengers, and then, in order that there might be room enough in the waggon to admit of his lying down, some of us walked on.

At the next farm we reached—some ten miles beyond the scene of the accident—the charitable Boer refused to allow us to leave the boy there, on the grounds that he was "only a nigger." He furthermore expressed

an opinion that we were fools not to have left him lying in the "veldt" to take care of himself, and burst into roars of laughter, when he learned that some of us had actually been walking on the boy's account. In consequence, we now had to take the wounded "Tottie" fifteen miles further on, to the next farm-house, where his own master lived; and he had to put up with the pain caused by the jolting of the waggon for another two hours. The distance was too great for any of us to walk, as we should have been left too far behind the waggon; so we squeezed in as best we could, and drove on.

At midnight we reached the farm, and, to our surprise and disgust, the boy's master, an Englishman, only repeated the advice which had been given to us at the last halting-place by the Boer, applying to us, in addition, various uncomplimentary epithets suggestive of our want of sanity. He had Piet dragged out of the waggon; cursed him for an awkward fool; threatened to have him flogged for each day that he was deprived of his services; and finally announced his intention of turning him out in the "veldt" in a week, should he not have recovered by that time.

We went on again about three in the morning, leaving Piet in the hands of this Samaritan; and the incident was soon forgotten, until about two months later, when as I was sitting with my partner D—— outside our little frame tent, on the dusty plain of the New Rush, Piet suddenly dropped upon us, asking for work. He recognised me at once; said that his master had turned him out, as he had threatened to do; and added that, as I had already done something for him, it was my duty to do something more.

It happened that we wanted a cook and general factotum at that time, so we engaged him on the spot; and we never had any reason to complain of our bargain, for he stole far less from us than any other native we ever employed. Of this strange moderation in peculation, however, we of course knew nothing when he came to us; and, indeed, our principal reason for engaging him was, that he understood a little English, a rare accomplishment amongst the natives of the western province of the old colony, who almost invariably speak Dutch. He had probably learned what he knew at his last place; and, though it is true that his English

was not very good, it was far better than our Dutch, and we contrived to understand each other without difficulty.

Notwithstanding his scepticism, Piet had prejudices. One evening, after a dusty day's work at the sorting-table, I wandered down a "donga," out by the low hills towards the Vaal, with my gun, to try and shoot a coran or something for supper. I saw no corans, but I shot a hare, some of which we ate, and told Piet that he might have what remained. He was usually voracious enough; but this time he made a grimace indicative of repugnance, and gravely announced that he wanted something else, as he could not eat hare.

For some time he would not tell us what objection he had to that animal, but after much urging he told us the following tradition:

"The moon comes, by-and-by it dies, and then it comes to life again. The moon once called the hare, and said to him: 'Go to men, and tell them that, as I die and come to life again, so shall they also die and come to life again.' The hare went accordingly as he was told, and when he returned the moon asked him:

'What did you say?' The hare replied: 'I have told them that as you die and come not to life again, so shall they also die and come not to life again.' 'What,' said the moon, 'did you say that?' And being angry, he took up a stick, and hit the hare on the mouth, which became slit."

Therefore, according to Piet, no Hottentot will eat hare, because he brought the wrong message, and was thus the cause of death.

The Zulus have a legend analogous to this, but with different "dramatis personæ." According to their version, the "Umkulunkulu," or Deity, sent a chameleon to tell men that they should not die. The chameleon, however, went slowly, and stopped on the road to eat the leaves of a certain shrub. In the meantime the "Umkulunkulu" changed his mind, and sent the "i'ntulwa," a species of lizard, to overtake the chameleon, and tell men that they must die. The "i'ntulwa" set out, passed the chameleon, and arriving first at the place where the men were, told them that they must die.

D—— kept a thermometer hung up on a nail which was driven into one of the ridge-poles of the tent, and the mercury in the tube and bowl much exercised the mind of Piet.

He asked us frequently what it was for, and evidently regarded our explanations as to the use of the instrument as mere subterfuges designed to disguise the truth, asking:

"What the use of such ting? S'pose I see cloud dis side over dar, den me know rain soon catch dis part, and make plenty cold. S'pose you no able for tell if day hot or cold without dem ting?"

The word "mercury," too, he considered a slang name we had invented to describe the metal in the bowl; and one day, when D—— happened to refer to it as "quicksilver" in Piet's presence, I could see a sudden gleam of intelligence in the boy's eyes, and a pleased expression on his flat countenance, as if he had at last received corroborative evidence of a fact which he had long suspected. Next day we came back from the claim somewhat earlier than was our custom, on account of the unusual heat; and when D—— went, as usual, towards the thermometer to see what the temperature was, behold, no thermometer was there!

We, of course, suspected Piet at once, and searched high and low for him. He was nowhere near our tent, but after some time we discovered him at a little distance,

crouched down behind a heap of "stuff" near a sorting-table, busily engaged with something on the ground. We approached him on tip-toe, and beheld an amusing sight. Before him on the ground lay the broken thermometer, and beside it, in the dust, was a glistening little silver globule of mercury. Piet's eyes were fastened upon this with a mingled expression of amazement and fright. Every now and then he would cautiously extend a finger and thumb and endeavour to pick up the mercury, which naturally escaped him, and rolled to one side. His action and expression each time he found he had missed it were so absurd, that at last we could not restrain our laughter; he at once heard us, looked round, and the next moment was dancing about and making grimaces at us two hundred yards off.

It was not until the pangs of hunger compelled him, towards the evening, to approach the tent, that we caught him. He expressed contrition, but seemed to think, at the same time, that we had played rather a shabby trick on him.

"What for you tell me that silver live in dem ting for?" he asked. "Why you no

say it witchcraft, and then I leff him? That no good silver—not money silver."

Piet pretended to have a great affection for me, and I have no doubt he liked me better than he did D——, for I was far too lenient with him. I went away once for four days to Pniel to bathe in the river and try to become clean, for I had been sleeping in my boots, on the earth, for more than four weeks, and had only been able, such was the scarcity of water, to wash once during that period. When I returned, Piet greeted me with open arms. I asked him how he had been getting on in my absence, and he answered: "Oh, well enough, baas. I cry for you all time. I miss you plenty, and when I no see you, I go smell your coat." If strength of perfume afforded him any satisfaction, he must have got plenty out of that old coat, for it was mud-stained, dirty, and sun-scorched to the last degree.

Some four months after we had taken Piet into our service, my partner and I decided to leave the diamond fields and try our luck at the Transvaal gold diggings. Several causes induced us to come to this decision. The expenses of working a claim at the New Rush were exceedingly heavy, amounting to at least

fifty pounds a month; and, though one might at any time come upon a diamond worth several thousand pounds, which would well repay one for all advances made to fortune, and even make amends for the hard life, discomfort, and hard labour; yet, on the other hand, as had persistently happened in our own case, one might only find, month after month, inferior stones, splints, and "boart," which would hardly pay for working the claim. At that time, too, marvellous tales were afloat as to the richness of Pilgrim's Rest in alluvial gold—how one man had hit upon a "pocket" containing nearly four hundred ounces; how another had taken two pounds' weight of nuggets out of the stream in one afternoon, by simply turning over boulders and rocks, and searching under them, and so on.

At all events, having worked off and recovered from the diamond fever, we took the gold fever; and it happening that an "up-country" trader in ostrich feathers and ivory was going north through the Transvaal, we sold our claim at the New Rush, and arranged with him to carry our few belongings as far as our two roads lay in common. Everything being completed, we left Du Toit's Pan early

one morning and struck into the road which traverses the Middleveld, and leads in a north-easterly direction through a sparsely settled district of the Orange Free State, past Kopje Alleyne, to the town of Potchefstroom, in the Transvaal.

Two days out from Bashof we outspanned in the "veldt" near the Vet River, a tributary of the Vaal, close to a "donga" which contained a few pools of water from recent rains. On these high inland plateaus an astonishingly cold blast whistles over the earth at night, and we gladly huddled round the fire which the "boys" had lighted for us — their own being, as usual, at some little distance—and watched Piet frying some springbok cutlets and boiling the coffee. Our supper over, we lighted our pipes, and, wrapped in our "karosses," lay down to smoke, and talked. The wind blew colder and colder, and we were all agreed that the situation was most unsatisfactory. If we lay with our feet to the fire, our heads were numbed by the blast; to lie with our heads to the blaze was out of the question; and if we lay sideways, one side was roasted while the other was frozen. Thick as was my sheep-skin "kaross," I soon decided that

uncomfortable as was the interior of the waggon, encumbered as it was with barrels and wooden cases, it would be desirable to seek that shelter. The trader shared my opinion, and we climbed in and disposed ourselves to the best advantage on the angular heap; while D——, who was more luxurious, and objected to any couch harder than the earth, strolled off to a clump of low bushes which grew near the "donga" at a distance of some forty yards, with the intention of lying down under their shelter. Hard as was my bed, the fatigue of the day—for we had walked many miles and had been up since daybreak—soon brought about its natural results. For a few minutes I heard the flapping of the waggon-tilt in the breeze, the chatter of the "boys" around their fire, and the yelping of a distant pack of jackals, and then fell asleep.

I had been sleeping for about two hours, when I was awakened by a great squealing and commotion amongst the mules. This was followed by a snarl, which, limited as was then my experience, I had no difficulty in at once recognising as that of a leopard. Taking from the hooks on which it was hung, my gun, a wretched article of Belgian manufacture which

I had purchased at Cape Town, and which had the left barrel rifled, I jumped out of the waggon and saw Piet and the other boys busily employed in throwing blazing ox-chips from the fire towards the clumps of bushes whence the squealing and snarling proceeded. It seemed that the mules, being of the same opinion as D——, had also sought the shelter of the bushes to escape the wind, and a leopard, stealing up the "donga," had sprung upon one; for in a few seconds, D—— and a crowd of mules appeared on the plain. He told us that he had been aroused by a mule trampling on him; that at the instant of waking, he had seen a leopard spring at the shoulder of the very beast that was treading upon him; that the mule, being knee-haltered, had fallen on him; and that he had escaped from the *mêlée* considerably the worse for bruises. He dilated upon the cat-like motions and green-glistening eyes of the leopard, and endeavoured to impress upon us that he had had a very narrow escape indeed. We believed as much of this as we pleased, and lighting bunches of rhinoster bush, went towards the scene of the conflict. The leopard had not, of course, waited to be interviewed; but we found the mule alive, literally

kicking, and terribly mauled. It would be of no use for draught purposes for some weeks, and the trader, filled with fury, vowed that as soon as daylight permitted, he would follow up and settle scores with the enemy. We applauded this resolution, for although we had already on one or two occasions lain out at night to watch for leopards, we had not yet succeeded in shooting one, and we were anxious to establish our reputations.

Immediately after daybreak we descended into the "donga." Each of us Europeans had a rifle, and Piet accompanied us with an old fowling-piece loaded with slugs. He was full of confidence, and bragged about what he would do should he come across the leopard. Two of the traders' "boys," both Ama-Swazis, and good hands at picking up "spoor," led the van. The bottom of the "donga" was about fifteen feet below the level of the plain, and about forty yards wide where we entered it. In parts, where the scour had been great, the walls were perpendicular and bare; but generally they were broken up by smaller "dongas," opening to the right and left into the plain.

The two Kaffirs, after a moment or two of hesitation, turned their backs upon the

river into which the "donga" discharged, and advanced slowly up the latter. At first, the bed consisted of sand and loose stones, with here and there a tangle of uprooted mimosa and tall Tambookie grass; but as we proceeded, the vegetation became thicker. Our advance was somewhat slow, as each lateral "donga" had to be searched before we could pass its mouth, and at the end of an hour we were still only a quarter of a mile from the outspan. We were moving cautiously along, when a hare leaped suddenly from its form and bolted between D——'s legs, nearly causing him to fire his rifle in his alarm. Piet's face at once became downcast. "Bess for turn back," he said to me, "or some person go die this day." It was the apparition of the hare, the messenger of death to man, which put this idea into his head, and we told him he could go back if he liked; but he seemed ashamed to appear afraid, and followed on.

A quarter of a mile further up the "donga" we were pushing through some tall grass that reached to our hips, when we saw the grass at some little distance in front swaying about as though some animal were passing through it.

"Pas op" ("Look out"), cried the Kaffirs, as they threw a handful of stones at the spot where the grass was in motion; and the next moment a leopard gracefully leapt over the grass and disappeared round the angle in the "donga." D—— and the trader both took snap shots as he went, and both apparently missed. At all events, we were now sure that we were upon the right track, and we followed up eagerly. The "donga" had now narrowed to some ten yards in breadth, and the bed was much choked with thorns and rocks, so that we could only move on with difficulty; but there was no exit except the way by which we had come, and we felt certain of our quarry.

After about another quarter of an hour, the leading Kaffir stopped, gesticulated to the trader, and pointed towards a ledge of rock which projected from one wall of the "donga," about ten feet from the bed, and which was thickly covered with bush and heath. We could see nothing at first, but the quick eyes of the Ama-Swazi had discovered the hiding-place of the enemy, through a few inches of exposed tail which protruded from the cover. After a few seconds' consultation it was decided that D—— and I should fire at that spot which ought to

conceal the animal's body, while the trader reserved his fire in case ours should not prove fatal.

Our two rifles exploded simultaneously, the bushes were violently agitated, a loud screech echoed down the "donga," and before we could think what to do the wounded leopard was amongst us. I threw myself to one side, so as to give him plenty of room to pass me, but fortunately he did not come in my direction. All I could see was a yellowish-brown object shoot through the air, and the next moment poor Piet was down on his back and the leopard on top of him. I could hear a horrible crunching and growling, and the hind legs of the leopard seemed to be working like those of a cat when it is scratching up the ground. My right barrel was loaded with slugs, but I could not fire without hitting the boy, and for the same reason the trader was unable to do anything. A sudden movement of the leopard, however, gave the latter a chance; for he at once fired, and with a strange sound, something between a cough and a sob, the animal fell, quivering in every limb. All this had occupied but a very few seconds.

We approached cautiously, for there still might be life in the creature; but he was really dead, and we dragged the carcase off Piet, who was lying underneath. The boy was living, but terribly wounded.

We saw at once that there was no hope. Piet tried to smile as I bent over him, but succeeded but feebly.

"I tell you some person go die this day," he said. "All same that hare, liar hare. He run against the baas, not 'gainst me. Baas proper man for die. Gimme drop o' drink."

And with these words on his lips he died.

IV.

AN IDYL OF GONG-GONG.

Of all the mining camps which sprang up upon the quiet banks of the Vaal River, during the great rush in the first year of the discovery of diamonds in South Africa, that of Gong-gong was undoubtedly the most picturesque. It owed its existence to a sudden bend of the river, which, cutting into the abrupt red heights of Cawood's Hope on the opposite side, left, stretched along under the low hills of the northern bank, a broad and level spit of river detritus. So favourable a spot as this spit was not likely to escape the observation of the hundreds of "prospecting" parties who were scattered up and down the river; a few trial holes were dug, and the yield of diamonds being good, work was commenced in earnest, diggers flocked in, and the camp was established.

Gong-gong, however, never attained any great pre-eminence as a camp, and though some two hundred claims were opened, they were soon abandoned for the superior attractions of Cawood's Hope and Seven Hells. Shortly after this the opening of the dry diggings at Du Toit's Pan and the New Rush ruined all the camps on the river, Gong-gong amongst the rest; and in December, 1871, only a score of tents stood dotted about among the clumps of acacia, which still fringed the confusion of the yawning pits and unshapely heaps of stones of the disused claims. The few diggers who remained were either sceptical persons who declined to believe in the lasting prosperity of the dry diggings, enthusiasts who were firmly persuaded that Gong-gong would be the camp of the future, or indolent men who liked the locality and were too lazy to move.

And indeed the scenery was sufficiently pretty to count for something. The broad and swift river swept onward between its red banks with many a graceful curve, and murmured and babbled over the pebbly shallows which were said to have given birth to the native name of Gong-gong, or "laughing

waters." At the drift the waters leaped and sparkled, and the sunlight flashed on the glistening surface of thousands of exquisite river agates—garnets, red and white cornelian, rose-quartz, jasper, chalcedony, and green beryl —lavishly strewn around by the hand of Nature, but regarded as mere dust by the digger in search of a short cut to fortune. The precipitous banks on the Cawood's Hope side were clothed with tall and graceful African willows, while the sandy spit at Gong-gong was covered with thickets of the golden-flowered acacia and the pink-blossomed sugar-bush. Tall rushes rustled and swayed at the water's edge, clusters of arum lilies, known to the Africander as "pig lilies," whitened every gully and hollow, and low, undulating hills, sparsely covered with rhinoster bush, closed in the view.

A short distance above the half-deserted camp the river was so quiet that the "rietbok" lurked undisturbed amid the cool rushes during the hot noon, and at morning and evening the "duiker" might be seen stealing down amongst the bushes to drink. One gazed down upon the bright, sparkling river and the fresh, green foliage of Gong-gong with quite a sense of

grateful relief, after having tramped the nine miles of monotonous and dreary road from Klipdrift—nine miles of bare plain, backed by bare, flat-topped hills, and with nothing but an occasional stunted camel-thorn, stretching out its gaunt limbs like a weird sign-post, to break the sameness of the view.

After the dusty and fever-stricken camps on the De Beer plain had drawn away nine-tenths of the diggers from the river, Gong-gong became the Sleepy Hollow of the Diamond Fields, where men dreamed out a lazy existence, forgotten by the noisy, neighbouring world, and utterly careless as to its doings. The inhabitants of Klipdrift and Pniel might be exasperated almost past endurance by the sarcasms of the noisy, swaggering, and booted men who came down in crowds from the New Rush for change of air and ablutionary purposes; but Gong-gong was too much out of the way to be visited by any of these gentry, and was like some decayed and quiet old country town, cast into the shade and despised by its precocious manufacturing neighbour.

The fifty odd diggers who, towards the close of the year 1871, formed five-sixths of

the white population of Gong-gong, were one afternoon much excited by a startling rumour which spread through the camp. According to this rumour no less a strange animal than a woman had unexpectedly descended from an ox-waggon which had, a few minutes earlier in the day, arrived at the canteen which was managed by the enterprising Nathaniel Cobb. For months woman had been an unknown creature in the camp, and the excitement, consequently, ran high.

In the early days of the diggings, a few ladies, predatory in habit, animal in instinct, uncleanly in person, and scanty in attire, had honoured the camp with their presence. These ladies had been representatives of the "noble savage," as exemplified in the Koranna tribe of Hottentots, and their knowledge of the English language had been confined to a number of expressions which were, in the strictest sense of the word, unparliamentary. On the decadence of Gong-gong they had shifted the scene of their depredations to other camps, where men and money were more abundant.

The rumour, however, which was now agitating the camp, said that the new-comer

was not as the former representatives of her sex had been. It was even believed that she looked respectable; and when James Markwell, who had been passing by Cobb's canteen when she alighted from the waggon, and who had with praiseworthy zeal at once proceeded to the claims to tell the news, asserted that she wore boots and stockings, her claims to that high honour were accepted without question.

"Yaller leather boots, and white stockings with red stripes, as I'm a living man," reiterated Markwell, to the knot of bearded and dusty men who were leaning upon pickaxes and spades in careless attitudes around him; "yaller leather boots and white stockings with red stripes."

The speaker was a tall and thin man, attired in moleskin trousers, long boots, and a red-flannel shirt, the sleeves of which latter, rolled back nearly to the shoulder, exposed two long and lean, but sinewy arms, with an abnormal development of joint at the elbow; while the unnatural contiguity of his knees, when his feet were unduly separated, told of a similar disproportion of knee-joint. His face was indicative of a curious mixture of simplicity and thoughtfulness. The prominent

brow, with its straight and shaggy eyebrows, overhung and threw into shadow two deep-set and piercing gray eyes; but the mouth, half hidden as it was by a huge sandy moustache, was patently weak and irresolute; while the chin receded in a manner that not even the luxuriant growth of yellow beard could altogether disguise.

"A relation of Cobb's, I s'pose," ventured one of the group.

"His wife, p'raps."

"Or his mother," suggested another; "eh, Jimmy?"

"Couldn't be his mother," replied Markwell, who seemed to think it was his duty to undertake the defence of the personal attractions of the lady whose advent he had been the first to announce. "She didn't appear to be more'n nineteen or twenty."

"White, of course?"

"Ye-es, whitish. Pretty nigh pure white, I should think."

An immediate relaxation of interest was apparent at this announcement of the fact that the fair arrival was a representative of two or more varieties of the human race; and all appeared disappointed.

"It's just like Markwell," said Stokes, with a shrug, "to come taking us all from our work to tell us that a nigger woman has turned up."

"But she ain't nigger, Stokes," hurriedly explained the aggrieved Markwell; "she's very nigh white, and what colour there is I take to be Malay."

"Well, anyhow, nigger or Malay, she can't be a relation of Cobb's."

"No. Who can she be?"

As there appeared to be no prospect of this enigma being immediately solved, the men one by one slouched away, for it was near sunset, and the day's work was done; while Markwell went up the narrow path through the fringe of acacia scrub, which still threw a veil over the rude nakedness of the earth, where it had been scored, and pitted, and heaped up with stones and "stuff" in the palmier days of the camp.

About half-way up the gentle ascent, Markwell stopped at a canteen which stood on the right-hand side of the devious path. This canteen was presided over by a gentleman named Randall, and was known to the diggers "Randall's Bar." Randall and Cobb were

the only two canteen-keepers in the camp, and, in order to support the old aphorism that two of a trade never agree, they were rivals and bitter enemies.

The fact was that, thirsty as were the inhabitants of Gong-gong as a rule, they were insufficient in number to guarantee those profits which canteen-keepers expected in those days at the diamond fields. Fifty regular patrons, with incidental Kaffirs, Hottentots, and wayfarers thrown in, would be a very good basis for one canteen; but, when divided between two, they sufficed for neither. Each proprietor, therefore, grumbled and talked of soon going away, while each really intended staying where he was, hoping that the other would move off and leave him a clear field.

As a consequence of there being two canteens with rival proprietors, Gong-gong society was divided into two sets, and each bar was haunted by its own particular supporters. No ill-feeling, however, existed between these two parties beyond the personal hatred of the two principals for each other; for men are, in this respect, unlike women, and they neither become violent partisans about matters which do not concern

them, nor do they necessarily quarrel when much thrown together and deprived of the society of the opposite sex.

Standing by the door of Randall's Bar, leaning against one of the uprights of the tent-frame, and basking in the warm glow of the setting sun, was Italy, the representative of art at the diamond fields. He had given out, on his arrival from the New Rush, that he had come down to sketch; but he had now been a fortnight at Gong-gong, and had done nothing but lounge daily on a bank of fragrant heath, in the shade of a spreading tree, with his hat slouched over his eyes, and his pipe in his mouth, lazily listening to the babble of the water as it leaped over the rapids, the hum of the insects, and the chirp of the tree-cricket.

This exhausting kind of exercise, and a pretty regular attendance at Randall's, had occupied all his time, and it was evident that he was in no hurry to begin his work; though when Stokes, who prided himself on the possession of a vein of caustic satire, remarked that he was not at all likely to make himself ill through over-fatigue, he grew quite indignant, and declared that any idiot, who knew anything about art, knew that it was most neces-

sary to study the best points of view before commencing a picture.

The diggers, however, at these remote camps, were always inclined to regard visitors from the dry diggings with suspicion, believing that they had changed their residences on account of motives which it would have been inconvenient to explain; and any statements as to their motives in coming, made by such errant gentry, were invariably taken at a heavy discount.

The sun was now sinking like a ball of fire beyond the red-ochre-coloured hills in the distance, throwing long golden rays of light over Gong-gong, tinging with a roseate hue the white tents dotted about among the acacias, and dancing in a thousand golden spangles on the rippling waters at the drift. From the claims men with pick and spade on shoulder were wending their ways towards their tents; the cradles were motionless on the river-bank; and here and there thin white curls of smoke, clearly delineated against the evening sky, rose up from numerous newly-lighted camp fires. From a little distance up the stream came down the sounds of laughter and voices, where some half-a-dozen diggers were splashing about

in the river after the day's work, and the echo rolled back sharply from the hills on the opposite bank, startling the buck in the reeds above the rapids.

As Markwell approached, Italy stretched out his arms and yawned.

"They have fine sunsets in Italy," he said, "but they can't hold a candle to those in this country."

It was this perpetual reference to the atmospheric and scenic conditions of Italy which had earned for the artist his "sobriquet," to which he answered quite naturally, and of which he even seemed vain.

Markwell, who was not inclined to be rapturous about the beauties of Nature, grunted assent; and the two men, as if moved by a common impulse, entered the tent and walked towards the liquor-stained boards, set on trestles, which formed the bar.

The proprietor, clad in an exceedingly dirty shirt, appeared ruffled in demeanour; and, as they entered, was anathematising an exasperating tumbler, which had maliciously bumped against his elbow, and then destroyed itself by leaping on to the stony ground. His annoyance was not diminished by the first

remark made by Italy, after the business preliminaries which had brought him and Markwell to the bar had been satisfactorily settled.

"So Cobb's got a young Malay girl come up to his place. She's to help at the bar, he tells me."

"So I hear," replied Randall curtly; while Markwell at once understood that the enigma which had a short time before defied solution was now successfully solved.

"Is she worth looking at?" continued the artist.

"Worth looking at?" exclaimed Markwell. "Wouldn't any gal be worth looking at, when you haven't seen one for six months?"

Randall grinned sarcastically.

"Some men," he remarked, apparently to a cask of Cape Smoke which stood beside him, "are such fools, that directly they see a petticoat they're bound to run after it; even when they've had enough to make them know better. Some men don't seem to profit nothing by experience."

Markwell was silent, crushed by this facer, for it was generally known at Gong-gong that

he had been taken in the springes set by a skittish matron of unequivocal virtue at Durban; and that her husband had then rounded on him, and caused him to become involved in some costly legal processes. It was even added that the proclivities of his better-half had been well known to the injured husband; but that he had not availed himself of previous opportunities of obtaining a release, because of the want of pecuniary position on the part of the culprit; that Markwell had been in fact a scapegoat, and that the judicial proceedings in which he had taken part, had been the cause of his appearance at Gong-gong.

"Anyhow," continued Italy, steadfastly pursuing the original subject, "it's a deep move of Cobb's to bring up a barmaid to a one-horse place like this. It's public-spirited, sir. I esteem him for it, sir." And with this parting shaft, he turned and left the tent.

The sun was now down beyond the hills; the gold in the picture had reddened to crimson, and the crimson deepened to purple. Then the purple darkened, the light died out of the stream, the trees assumed a sombre aspect, the shadows deepened and deepened,

lights began to appear in the camp, twinkling like so many feeble stars, and it became night.

The party of bathers came up from the river, laughing and talking, along the path which led past Randall's canteen. In the stillness of the night their conversation was distinctly audible. They were discussing Cobb's new departure. They reached the door of Randall's Bar, when a voice, which was at once recognised by the two men inside the tent as being the personal property of Stokes, was heard to say:

"Well, I s'pose we'll turn in here as usual."

"Oh, yes, cer'nly—by-an'-by. I'm just going up to Cobb's first, to see what his Malay gal's like," replied a voice.

"So am I."

"And I."

"And me too," added the rest in chorus.

Randall broke out into an eruption of profanity behind his bottles at this unanimity of sentiment on the part of his most regular customers; while Stokes, who took a certain amount of interest in Randall's welfare, because they were old friends, and both citizens of the same town, was heard to say outside:

"You don't mean to say you're all going to chuck old man Randall over, at this time o' day—after all this time?"

"Oh, no, we'll come back, you bet. We're just going to Cobb's out of curiosity, like. So'long, old man." And the crunching of their boots upon the pebbly path was heard passing the canteen, and dying away on the hill-side, along the road to the rival establishment.

Stokes entered the tent with a troubled expression of countenance.

"I'm afraid, old man," he said, "that this is going to be a bad business for you. None o' them chaps 'll come back. They're ashamed to say they ain't coming back; but you'll find they won't be ashamed to stay away."

Another eruption of profanity from the canteen-keeper was the only reply.

"Cussin' is all very well, in its way," continued Stokes meditatively. "It's a powerful relief to the mind; but I don't know that it ever helped a man out of a hole, by itself."

"P'raps not," retorted the outraged Randall; "but as you allow it's a relief, p'raps you'll permit me to enjoy it."

And he again exploded in a fiery shower of strong language.

"But what are you going to do? That's the point now."

"Dunno—I'm sure."

"Lower the price of your drinks—undersell Cobb," suggested Markwell.

"Oh, thank you very much. Cer'nly—that's the plan, of course. Stand free drinks to all you idle loafers in camp. Oh, yes—cer'nly," replied Randall with withering sarcasm.

"Bring up a gal, then, on your own account," continued the unabashed Markwell.

"Yes, that's your plan," put in Stokes. "A white one 'll settle Cobb's business easily."

A sudden inspiration seemed to strike the proprietor. He thumped the crazy counter with his fist, till the bottles and glasses jumped and jingled, and ejaculated:

"That's it. I'll send off to-morrow, home to Hopetown, for my sister."

"Your sister?" said Stokes, apparently surprised. "Why, I thought——"

His speech was suddenly cut short by a hideous grimace, which, simultaneously with a

wink, was launched at him by his fellow-townsman, who continued:

"Exactly so — as you say — my sister. Maria's a good deal like me. Good looks run in the family. She'll soon cut out that yaller gal of Cobb's." And he winked at Stokes, who burst into a fit of laughter.

About ten days afterwards, as Markwell was working in his claim, assisting his Kaffirs to move a large rock upon which they had just hit, he felt something strike him on the back, and a pebble dropped beside him. He looked up hastily and saw Stokes standing at the edge of the pit, regarding him with an amused expression.

"Curse your fooling," he exclaimed, "throwing stones like that. Are you drunk already?"

"She's come," replied Stokes, overlooking the imputation thus thrown upon his character.

"Who's come?"

"Maria's come."

"No!" exclaimed Markwell incredulously. "Randall's sister's come?"

"That's so, old man. I saw her just now getting out of the waggon up at his place. I think that Randall would take it friendly like if you'd just go up and offer to help him. I'd

go myself, but I've got some stuff I must get through before night."

Markwell put down his pick, which he had been using as a lever, and climbed up to the bank on which Stokes stood.

"This is no lie of yours, is it?" he said.

"No; it's gospel truth."

"All right, then; I'll go."

And, leaving his Kaffirs to get on without him as best they could, he strode away along the path to the canteen.

As he drew near, it became evident to him that Stokes had spoken the truth, a lurking doubt as to that gentleman's veracity having still obtruded itself upon him; for, standing in front of the tent was a white-tilted waggon with its long span of oxen. The Tottie driver was wrestling with a heavy wooden box, which he was endeavouring to extricate from the interior of the waggon, and Markwell addressed himself to him for information.

"Where's the young woman?" he asked, as he helped him to lower the box to the ground.

"Gone inside, baas."

Markwell looked inside the canteen, but the bar was empty, and he could see nothing

of the fair arrival. He entered and approached the counter, intending to knock, cough, or attract Randall's attention by some noise, when he heard voices behind the canvas screen which divided the bar from the rear half of the tent. Randall was speaking.

"Now take care you do it all right, and don't go putting your foot in it."

"All right, guv'nor. Don't you excite yourself. I'm all here—I'm Maria," replied a voice that was unknown to Markwell; but which, he concluded, could only be that of the canteen-keeper's sister.

A suppressed chuckle followed this speech, and the two persons continued conversing; while Markwell, either not liking to play the eavesdropper, or finding himself unable to hear what they were saying—for they were now speaking in lower tones — moved away and stood outside the tent, regarding the stout oxen before him with a critical eye. Presently he heard a slight noise behind him, and, turning round, he saw Randall approaching from behind the screen. The latter nodded to Markwell.

"Maria's come," he said.

"Yes, I thought so, from this caravan

outside," replied Markwell. "And I just looked in to see if I could help you in anything."

The proprietor scratched his chin thoughtfully for a moment.

"Well, there ain't anything you can do, thankey. Maria's a bit tired with her journey; you'll see her this evening."

So saying, he once more disappeared behind the screen, and Markwell returned to his claim.

Markwell was somewhat later than usual in going to Randall's Bar that night. After taking his customary plunge in the river, he had, from some motive which he could not perhaps have explained even to himself, and although it was not Sunday, put on his other shirt, which he had washed out a day or two before. It was of a rich purple hue, and rejoiced in a luxuriant crop of pockets bursting out all over its front. As he neared the canteen, the confused murmur of voices, and the steady and continued popping of corks, informed him that his friend's stratagem had so far succeeded, and that a large proportion of the inhabitants of Gong-gong had been won from the lures of the black-eyed Malay

girl by the superior attractiveness of Miss Randall.

He could not help smiling as he thought of the now deserted condition of the opposition bar-keeper, and congratulated himself upon always having remained one of Randall's most staunch supporters; feeling certain that his sister would make some distinction between her brother's old friends and those of a more recent standing.

The canteen was so crowded when he entered, that it was only with some little difficulty that he succeeded in making his way towards the counter; but a pair of saucy black eyes, smiling archly at him from behind that obstruction, encouraged him to overcome every obstacle. The saucy eyes were in truth the only good points to be discerned in the countenance of the fair Maria, who, attired in a light cotton dress, was assisting her brother in dispensing drinks. Her complexion was of a red-brown tint, and her skin was not as smooth as it might have been, but this was doubtless due to habitual exposure to sun and air; her mouth, which was rather large, was only redeemed from actual ugliness by the superb white teeth which it enshrined; while

her black hair was almost as short as that of a boy, and dotted thickly with numerous little screws of curl-paper. However, to the gentlemen who now filled the tent, and who for many months had not cast eyes upon a white woman, she appeared the personification of female beauty, and they would have indignantly vindicated her charms against those of the Cytherean Venus herself.

Markwell removed his felt hat with a certain awkwardness, as if he had almost forgotten how to make that necessary salutation, and extended his sunburnt hand towards the fair Maria, who, being informed by Randall that "this was Markwell," shook it warmly, and remarked in rather hoarse tones, that she had heard of him from her brother. He endeavoured to mutter his acknowledgments; but, perhaps overcome by the lady's affability, or perhaps ill at ease because he saw Stokes looking at him with a curious smile, he was forced to take shelter behind the bowl of his pipe, and to reinvigorate himself with a "pick-axe," by which designation a fiery mixture of Cape Smoke, Pontac, and ginger-beer, was known at the Fields. Later on in the evening, he made some original and interesting remarks

upon the state of the weather, which were so smilingly received by the lady, that he was encouraged to continue the conversation; and the fair Maria exhibited such an entire absence of mannerism and affectation, and seemed so much above the ordinary prejudices and little weaknesses of her sex, that when Markwell said "good night," and strode to his tent along the dark and silent path, he thought that she was really one of the nicest young women that it had ever been his fortune to meet.

Before a week had passed, Markwell's attentions to Miss Randall had become so marked, and his attendance at the canteen of which she was the Hebe was so constant, even at hours during which a popular prejudice had decreed that none but "loafers" could be absent from their claims, that men winked at each other expressively whenever he passed near them, and referred to him with amused grins as "the bridegroom"; while some of the more venturesome among these humorists even went so far as to ask him not to forget them when the wedding came off. These sallies, however, were not received by Markwell with his usual careless indifference. On one or two occasions, he even showed his want of

appreciation of the joke by applying various uncomplimentary epithets to the most persistent of the wits, promising also, in case of necessity, to bring physical arguments into play, in order to put a stop to such misplaced humour; and as it was known that he could at need sling an ugly left, the intimation at once had the desired effect.

Miss Randall's conduct, and her motives in encouraging the attentions of her ungainly admirer, were discussed freely and unconventionally by the community. Many of the younger men, perhaps smarting under a feeling that their own merits and personal charms had not been properly appreciated, characterised her behaviour as "indecent" and "disgusting"; but the majority of diggers were of opinion that the young lady was merely amusing herself at the expense of her swain, or, as they graphically termed it, was "just fooling him."

"I saw the old fool risking his precious neck to get her a bit o' pink blossom out o' one o' them big trees below the drift," said a confirmed misogynist. "And, just like all wimmen, she'd no sooner got it than she said she didn't want it, and that she hated flowers and such trash."

"He wasted a fine four-carat stone on her the other mornin'," added another. "He was givin' it to her just as I went into the bar."

Certainly, Markwell had nothing to complain of on the score of coyness in his mistress. Twice she had condescended to go down to the river-side and watch him at work at the sorting table, jumping over the rocks and little pools of water that lay in her way, with an innocent abandon which a more hypercritical society would perhaps have stigmatised as indecorous. It was with a childish delight that she watched her admirer remove tray after tray of glistening river agates from the cradle; and when she rocked that useful machine for a few moments with her foot, the onlookers at once discovered that the action was but a new development of the maternal instinct.

"She appears to be getting her hand in for the heavy business of marriage," said Italy. "It's the same kind of natural instinct that makes little girls nurse dolls."

Although all these marks of preference were thus lavished upon him, Markwell was not quite easy in his mind. Upon two occasions he had, on entering the canteen, dis-

covered Stokes engaged in an animated conversation with the bewitching Maria. These conversations had been cut short directly he appeared; but on one of the two occasions he had distinctly heard his name mentioned. The coldness with which Miss Randall usually treated Stokes, and the unmistakable rebuffs which she daily showered upon him, seemed, too, to speak of a dislike so exaggerated, that after a few days Markwell began to suspect that it was merely assumed to disguise a feeling of quite another nature. From that moment he began to hate Stokes, whom he could not help acknowledging to be a most formidable rival, both on account of his fluency of speech and undeniable good looks, and because of his former acquaintance with the young lady in her native town. Relations between the two men began to be somewhat strained, and the spirits of the camp became generally exhilarated at the speedy prospect of a row.

One evening, some three weeks after Miss Randall's arrival in camp, Markwell was horrified, on entering the canteen somewhat earlier than the usual hour, to hear a man's voice behind the canvas partition which was believed by the community to screen the young

lady's sleeping apartment from the public gaze, and that voice was not the voice of her brother. Scandalised to the last degree, and with ears quickened by jealousy, he soon recognised the tones as those of his rival; and, with the unbiassed judgment and calm consideration so peculiar to lovers, he at once put the worst construction upon his presence there. His first impulse was to burst upon the guilty pair, and shame them by his sudden apparition; his second, to wait outside for the hated rival and challenge him to mortal combat; but, on third thoughts, he decided to go away quietly to his tent, and deliberate upon his course of action.

Feeling conscious that conversation was not his strong point, and hoping to call into life the dormant germs of poesy which he felt certain that Nature had implanted in him, he had borrowed from Italy, some days previously, a book which the artist had assured him was "brimful of love and sickly nonsense," intending, if possible, to turn some of the most flattering speeches to his own account. The book was a novel which had been in fashion at the commencement of the present century, at which period, according to the author, people still conversed upon stilts. What he had

already read of it, had, he considered, justified a further confidence in its lessons, and to it he now turned for advice in the unpleasant circumstances in which he found himself. In the first chapter, which treated of two murders, an abduction, a secret marriage, and a haunted castle, he had read that when a young lady had suffered her affections to be engrossed by one of the sterner sex, she invariably treated the unfortunate object of her passion with coldness and disdain; while, on the other hand, she lavished her amiability upon some person towards whom she was totally indifferent. Viewed in the light of his recent discovery, how true, how unfailing was this proposition! The fair Maria had overwhelmed him with condescension and encouragement, while she had rarely spoken to Stokes, except to snub him. What a wonderful knowledge of human nature the gifted author of this priceless work must have acquired!

On this evening he hastily turned over the leaves to discover what mode of procedure was recommended for obtaining reparation for injury from a rival. He was unable to find a case exactly parallel with his own; but he read that, when rival suitors for a fair damsel's hand

chanced to meet, they addressed each other in stilted phrases and with strange oaths, and finally endeavoured to introduce several feet of cold steel to each other. He pondered long over this, wondering if it would be practicable for him to remove Stokes from the scene of action in this manner. He was obliged to decide that it was impossible. In the first place, he had no sword, and he doubted whether a revolver or sheath-knife could be used with propriety in such cases. In the second place, he remembered that in these degenerate days, should he chance to be the victor in the combat, an unpoetical judge and a matter-of-fact hangman would probably demand his attention to matters totally foreign to the original subject. While still thinking this over, the remnant of his candle disappeared with a hissing noise and much smoke into the interior of the bottle which did duty as candlestick; and he fell asleep to dream that an enormous eel, with the head and shoulders of Mr. Stokes, kept waltzing gracefully before him on its tail, while he made frantic but ineffectual efforts to slay it with a jewel-hilted rapier.

He was awakened by some hard substance coming forcibly in contact with his ribs, and,

opening his eyes, he perceived that the sun had risen, and that Stokes was standing over him, stirring him up with the toe of one of his formidable boots.

Half awake, and still confused by his dream, he sprang to his feet.

"I've got something to tell you," said Stokes, seating himself on the end of an empty brandy case.

This was said so lugubriously, and the man's appearance was so sad and downcast, that Markwell at once divined that something of importance had occurred; perhaps that the outraged Randall had demanded satisfaction for the injury done to his sister's fair fame, and he prepared himself to be as dignified and as sarcastic as possible.

Stokes sighed.

"I'm going to leave the camp to-day," he said, wiping his bronzed face with his shirt-sleeve, as if to conceal his emotion. "I've played the bold game, and I've lost. This ain't no place for me now."

Markwell made no remark, and the speaker continued:

"It's a queer come-down for me. I've always laughed at wimmen and gals, and never

troubled my head about them; and now to go such a reg'lar mucker over a bit of a gal like that, and to be told fair and square to clear out."

"Who's told you to clear out?"

"Maria."

A few moments of dead silence followed this disclosure, during which Stokes gazed sorrowfully down at his boots.

"I loved that gal, Jimmy," he said presently. "So help me, I loved that gal better than I ever thought to have cared for anything in a petticoat. You and me was old friends," he continued, stretching out his hand and resting it on his companion's shoulder; "yet, all along o' that gal, we've been getting cool and nearly quarrelling. But I didn't care a bit for that—friends, fun, licker—all was as nothin' to me compared with that gal."

Markwell took his friend's hand and wrung it silently.

"'Twas only last night," went on the disconsolate Stokes, "I said to myself I'll play the plucky game, and I went up there private like, and straight out asked her to marry me. . . . . She said 'No,' she couldn't. I felt just mad, and I asked her, 'Why not?' Says she,

'You're no gentleman, Mr. Stokes, or you'd take your answer and go.' I says, 'Maria, just tell me this. Is there any one in camp you like better nor me? Just tell me that, so that I can lay round for him with a club.' 'Ho,' says she, with her eyes flashin', 'and that's what you call love, Mr. Stokes, is it? You love me so much that you want to make me unhappy by killing the man I'm fond of.' I swore I wouldn't do no such thing, that I was wild, and didn't know what I was saying, and I asked her again to tell me the man. Says she, 'His name begins with a M.' I says, 'It's Jimmy Markwell;' and she says, 'I ain't a-going to deny it.' . . . . Jimmy, I felt bad, though I might have guessed that you would be the happy man. I thought that in the night I'd come down here, and then we'd see who was the best man. But then I thought again, what good would that do me? She'd never have me. So the long and short of it is, I'm going down to the Rush—I can't stay here now, and I just came to tell you all about it, and make friends again."

Markwell seized his visitor's hand, and wrung it until the tears came into his eyes.

"Say no more, say no more," he ejaculated.

"I'm sorry for you, old chap! Let's go and licker."

On their way to the canteen, Markwell confided to Stokes his suspicions of the previous night.

"You must have just reached there as I was proposin'," said the latter. "I asked her if I might just step behind for a minute."

Relieved by this simple explanation, Markwell went on to tell him how his worst fears had been seemingly confirmed by the authority of the novel. His companion treated with ridicule its dogma as to the manner in which young ladies usually behaved to secretly-favoured lovers.

"It's a set of lies," he said contemptuously. "Chuck the dratted thing away."

The two men entered Randall's tent arm-in-arm. The fair Maria received them with a certain amount of uneasiness. Markwell thought that her red-brown cheek was suffused with a deeper tint, when she perceived in whose company he was; and from this he surmised that she had, with the intuitive perception of her sex, already guessed that Stokes had violated her confidence.

Each man swallowed his drink in solemn

silence, and Maria occupied herself in attempting to wipe the tumblers, left by the revellers of the past night, with a cloth of doubtful cleanliness. While she was thus employed, Stokes seized the opportunity to advise Markwell to press his suit.

"Go in and win, old man," he whispered. "Now's your time. I'm going off to get my few traps together, and you'll have her all to yourself. It's too early for any one to come up here from the claims yet."

So saying, he once more wrung his companion's hand and strode out of the tent.

Left to himself, Markwell determined not to waste any precious time, but to come to the point at once.

"Maria," he said, "I'm a plain man, and I like plain speaking. I've had my fling in my time, and I've known wimmen and their ways more than has, perhaps, been good for me. Still, I've gained experience by that, and I know now how to tell an honest and straightforward gal from a flighty one. So what I have to say is this. If you'll take me I'll make you a good husband, and you shall never have a cross word or blow from me as long as you live."

Miss Randall had laid down the glass-cloth, and was gazing at the speaker with eyes wide open with amazement.

"As for position, I've got a little bit of land down at Durban, and this," continued Markwell, taking a small tin box from his pocket, and pouring a glittering little cascade of diamonds from hand to hand. "We shan't want, and I'm sure you'll never be sorry for marrying me."

He looked up as he concluded his speech, just in time to see Miss Randall disappearing behind the canvas screen; and next moment a hysterical sound, which he feared sounded strangely like suppressed laughter, broke upon his ear.

"Perhaps I was too hasty," he murmured, as with trembling hand he nervously tried to fix the lid upon his tin box and restore that to his pocket. "Anyhow, I'll wait here till I get an answer."

In a few seconds Randall appeared from behind the partition. He looked curiously at Markwell.

"What's this you've been saying to Maria?" he inquired.

"Nothing that I need be ashamed of, or

that you need get riled about. I've asked Maria to be my wife."

Randall appeared annoyed.

"You've made a pretty mess of it, you have," he said.

"How?"

"Maria ain't my sister at all."

"Not your sister? What is she, then? Your wife, I s'pose, or at all events she ought to be. But of all the mean plants, to go passing her off as your sister——! It's playing it pretty low down on this camp, and on me particularly."

"Go slow, go slow," interrupted Randall; "there's no such hurry. She ain't my wife nor sweetheart either."

"Then what in thunder is she?"

"Just this—she's my young brother. You see how it was," he went on hastily. "There was that fellow Cobb drawing every idle fool up to his place with his Malay gal. You may remember you advised me to bring up a white one. Well, I hadn't any sisters. I didn't know whom to get; so I got my young brother to come up from Hopetown, dressed as a gal. And he came, and he's Maria. That's all.'

"Oh, that's all, is it?"

"Yes, that's all. And now Cobb's gone. He went off last night, clean broke, so we're not going to keep the game up any longer; but nobody knows about this mistake of yours except us three, and you may depend it shan't go no further. You've always stuck to me, and now I'll stick to you. All the other chaps were taken in just the same as you, except Stokes. He knew all about it, of course."

"Oh! he knew, did he? Hang him," said Markwell, nervously turning to the door.

"Yes. He knew. He's a Hopetown man, same as myself."

"And it won't go any further, you think? Just look over there and you'll see."

And Markwell pointed out of the tent door to a group of diggers standing away down on the river-bank. In the midst of them, Stokes was distinctly visible; and to judge from the shouts of laughter and the convulsive movements of the men surrounding him, he was apparently making some amusing communication to them.

"There he is, curse him," said the unfortunate digger savagely. "He put me up to the whole thing this very morning, and now he's fooling me to the whole camp."

As he spoke, the group below moved away from the river, and struck into the path leading to Randall's canteen.

"They're coming up here," said the manager of that establishment, "and I guess you're in no hurry to meet them. You can go out by the back door, they won't see you then." And he led Markwell behind the screen to the back of the tent, where a narrow path led through the acacia scrub up to the plateau behind.

He had hardly disappeared amongst the bushes, when a noisy, shouting, and laughing crowd rushed into the bar, asking for Markwell; and, upon Randall assuring them that he had left some little time before, they proceeded in a body to his tent, and then to his claim; but finding him at neither of those places, they decided to wait until evening for their amusement.

Evening came, and night, and the next morning, but Markwell appeared not; and the general opinion was that he dared not face the laughter of the entire camp, and had gone to try his luck at dry diggings. Three days later, however, as Italy was wandering about with a gun in the scrub about a mile below camp, looking out for a shot at a pouw or

a buck, he suddenly disturbed a number of vultures, who were engaged in their usual loathsome task. Naturally imagining the prey to be the carcase of an ox or a mule, he was about to turn aside when a long digger's boot caught his eye, and he saw the half-devoured remains of a man, lying stretched on his back. The torn fingers were still grasping a revolver, and the unhappy man had died by his own hand. It was Markwell.

V.

TWO LOOKS AT A RIVER.

We were looking forward to our arrival at the Zout, or Salt, River, in the belief that we should at last be able to wash there. At least such of us as had not been sufficiently long in the colony to have become accustomed to that condition of dirt, which, through the scarcity of water, is imposed upon one almost as a necessity "up country," were so looking forward; and the upward Diamond Field Transport waggon contained an unusual proportion of "new hands" amongst its passengers on this trip. They were mostly recent arrivals from England, young men pushed by the restless spirit of the Anglo-Saxon, and by a contributory impecuniosity, to leave the scenes of their social successes in the Northern Hemisphere, and rough it for a time in South Africa. It is needless to say that they were

bound for the Diamond Fields, that El Dorado, that haven of the blest, towards which the steps of the adventurous, the idle, and the scape-graces of many lands were now turned. They were buoyant and full of spirits, confident that in a few months, or in a year at the most, they would return home with pockets full of money, and sufficiently capacious to provide them with the luxuries of the world for the remaining term of their existences. They talked of short cuts to wealth, and spoke contemptuously of the plodding, muddy-minded men, who were content to grovel on at money-making in the old conventional grooves, when such magnificent opportunities as those afforded by the diggings were available. Alas for the rose-coloured pictures of youth! It is now nearly fourteen years since these enthusiasts arrived at the Cape, and they are still there, and have not yet succeeded in amassing those "piles" which were to throw into deep shadow the fortunes of the most successful financiers of Europe.

To these youths the journey had so far proved exceedingly unpleasant. Since they had left Cape Town five days before, all ablution had been confined to a mere daubing

of face and hands with a little coffee-coloured water contained in a tin pannikin; and they had been so restricted at a time when from the intense heat and perpetual clouds of dust, a good bathe would have been most necessary and enjoyable. I could not help pitying them, torn as they were by a resistless impulse or implacable fate from the charms of town—where the matutinal tub was an article of religious belief; where two clean shirts a day were considered a necessity of life; and where the smallest wrinkle in the smooth expanse of collar, or the least speck of dust upon the glossy surface of the coat, was a matter of mortal anguish—to be suddenly plunged into dirt inconceivable, where one had to wear the same shirt for a week at least; where washing was impossible; and where fleas, flies, dust, and perspiration combined to make one feel thoroughly miserable. Roughing it they were prepared for, hard fare and bedless nights they would have put up with; but this horrible condition of uncleanliness was a thing that they had not anticipated, and their complaints were loud and frequent.

"I don't mind the discomfort and want of sleep," murmured my next-door neighbour in

the waggon, a smooth-faced youth with fair hair and light blue eyes; and who, having neglected to study when at the establishment of the expensive "Army crammer" in which his parents had placed him, had failed to qualify for the honour of wearing Her Majesty's uniform. "I don't mind the jolting, the bruises, and the hard seats; but, by Jove, I can't stand this continual state of filth. I feel so beastly dirty." And he looked despondently at the rich coating of red dust which covered his hands and arms.

They had crossed several so-called rivers in their route, but they had all been dry; and the mirage in the Karroo, which had displayed before them at dawn a tantalising vision of a broad sheet of placid water, fringed with dwarfed willows, had only made them suffer the more by its cruel deception. They consequently eagerly looked forward to the Salt River, which, the guard assured them, would have at least some pools of water in its channel; for did it not drain the rugged basaltic hills of Bulbhouders Bank (as the eastern spur of the Nieuwveld Mountains was called), whose sterile steeps were too flinty to absorb the dew or rain which might fall upon them, and all of which

would, in consequence, collect into the bed of the river.

We had left Beaufort West at nine in the morning, had crossed the Beaufort Flat with its clumps of acacias; traversed an arid, sterile, and naked plain, outspanned for an hour at noon in the "veldt" to eat a hasty meal of biscuit and "biltonge," and were now, at six in the evening, looking out for Debenish's Farm, just beyond which was the Salt River.

According to the guard's original programme, we were to have arrived at Debenish's at half-past six, had supper there, and have left at half-past seven; and it was only after his seasoned palate had been liberally moistened by "nips" of whisky, Cango brandy, and Cape Smoke, that he had consented to lengthen his stay by half-an-hour to give us an opportunity of bathing. This eagerness to become clean was to him an inexplicable enigma.

"S'pose you do wash in the river," he said again and again. "Twelve hours after you will be just as dusty as ever. What's the use of taking the trouble of undressing for nothing?"

All the hopes of the "new hands" were pinned upon the Salt River, for after crossing

that we should come upon no river containing water till we struck the Orange River at Hopetown, and that would be three days further on. The number of questions that were asked the guard about the river—Why was it called the Salt River? Was it deep? Was it broad? Was the current strong? Could one take a header? — these, and a hundred different questions, put forward in various guises, made the guard break out into explosions of strange Africander oaths at least twenty times a day.

Hadn't he said, till he was sick of saying it, that at this time of year there wouldn't be more than a few pools of water among the rocks? Would they be deep? No; they wouldn't. How many more times did they want to ask these questions? Any fool would know that there wouldn't be more than enough water to cover his ankles. Were they trying to run a joke on him? If so——, and the volleys of imprecations rolled away from the back seat into the clouds of red dust that followed the waggon.

Just before 6.30 p.m. the mules drew up at Debenish's, a farm-house both internally and ---ally superior to anything of the kind I

have ever seen "up country," and the waggon disgorged its tired and dusty occupants. "The boys," as the English youths had come to be known to their Colonial fellow-passengers, dived into their bags for soap and towels, hurriedly inquired which was the shortest way to the river, and at once started off. I, too, departed in the same direction, for I had not then been long enough in South Africa to have got over that foolish prejudice against dirt, and I still looked upon bathing as a duty, and one that was not altogether unpleasant.

An irregular line of wind warped African willows and acacias defined in the plain before us the course of the river, and in a few minutes we reached it. At the point at which the road crossed, a dry, shingly bed of sand, grit, pebbles, and larger stones, looking as parched as if no water had moistened it since the Deluge, extended from one bank to the other. These latter were almost perpendicular, except where they had been cut down for the road; and their smoothly swept faces told of the strength of the stream which at times flowed between them; while five or six feet above the dry bed, tufts of withered grass, dead camel-thorn branches, and other débris, tangled in

the half-bared roots of the trees which sparsely fringed the summits of the banks, marked the height to which the last flood had risen.

A groan of disappointment broke from "the boys" at the appearance of the dry bed; but plucking up hope, they commenced searching among the rocks up and down stream for water. One of them, who had apparently read books of Travel and Adventure much more studiously than he had the subjects for his examination for the Indian Woods and Forests, proposed to dig in the shingly bed till he struck water; but the proposition met with little support, and as there was no spade at hand, it was hardly practicable. We walked altogether about half-a-mile up the bed, and then, as the channel seemed to become drier and drier with every yard, I went back to the farm for supper. I advised "the boys" to follow my example; but they were too enthusiastic to think about eating, and continued their search amongst the loose stones and occasional rocks.

About an hour later, as the drivers were inspanning the mules, and we were getting ready to start, "the boys" returned, thirstier, dirtier, and more tired than when they had

left the waggon, and hungry into the bargain. They had searched for three miles up the stream; now ankle-deep in sand, now climbing over a ridge of rocks, and now over the splintered and bleached trunks and limbs of uprooted trees; and at last, at a spot where the rotatory motion of pebbles and grit, caught in an eddy under one bank, had, in the course of years, ground a cup-like hollow into an outcrop of flat rock, they found some water, to the extent of perhaps four quarts. That was all they had seen, and they had drunk that, because they had grown so thirsty by that time, that bathing had become quite a secondary consideration. Such was the Salt River when I saw it for the first time.

Some months later, I again saw the Salt River, but under very different circumstances. I was going southward then, and travelling in a Cape cart, drawn by two horses and driven by the owner, who was giving me a lift down. There had been heavy thunderstorms almost daily, and the Orange River, when we had crossed it at Salt Pan's Drift, had been rolling on in a turbulent flood that threatened very shortly to make the working

of the "pont," or floating bridge, impossible. We had stopped at Philipstown in the midst of a heavy downpour; the Hondeblas was rising fast, and the flat-topped hills of the Paarde Berg and Rhinoster Berg had been crowned with masses of dark clouds, extended in sharply-defined horizontal lines. It poured with rain as we left Murraysberg and ascended into the Sneeuwberg District; cold gusts of wind drove clouds of rain-spray into the cart, and caused the tilt to tug and flap as if it were about to break loose; while on every side, as far as the eye could reach, was nothing to be seen but a lowering canopy of lead-coloured clouds and an apparently endless plain dotted with puddles.

It was nearly dusk when we reached the Salt River, and we found, halted on our side of the stream, an ox-waggon, with a span of fourteen oxen, which had arrived a few minutes before us, and which we had seen crawling along the road in front of us for the last half-hour. The Tottie "fore-louper," or boy who leads the leading pair of oxen, scantily attired in a tattered flannel shirt, was standing by the span shivering with cold; and the warm breath of the cattle, as they stood with lowered heads

and sterns turned towards the rain, rolled in misty vapour along the sodden ground. The owner of the ox-waggon, a man of about forty years of age, with a sunburnt face, long and unkempt hair, and a thick, sandy beard, was standing on the river-bank, leaning on the bamboo handle of his long whip, gazing reflectively at the stream; and, inferring from his contemplative attitude that the river had risen, we got out of our cart and walked down towards him.

The scene was indeed changed. In place of the dry expanse of shingle which I had seen there before, a smooth, brown and foam-flecked flood rolled onward between the vertical banks, pitted and spotted in a thousand places by the heavy drops of rain which fell upon its turbid surface; the willows, tossed to and fro by the wind, shook and tottered in their crazy footholds on the verges of the banks; the waning light of evening, further obscured by the falling rain and the lead-coloured sky, gleamed with a sallow glow upon the surface of the water; and the whole universe appeared to reek and stream with moisture. It was one of the most depressing evenings that I remember.

The man with the beard looked up at us, nodded, and, shaking the accumulated drops of water from the brim of his felt hat, came to join us.

"Are you goin' to try to cross?" he asked.

"I think so," replied my friend. "What do you say?"

"Well, I don't know this river, so I can't tell what depth of water there may be. P'raps one of you might be able to say?"

I said that I thought I could estimate the depth. I said that I had noticed, when I was there before, that the banks were about seven feet high, that at present there appeared to be about five feet from the top of the bank to the surface of the water, and that consequently the latter could only be about two feet deep. I added that the bed was fairly level where the road crossed it, and that the stream would not be deeper in the middle than at the sides.

"Well," continued the man with the beard, "I shall be main glad if I can get across to-night, and outspan at Debenish's, for I 'spect my wife in thar' to be confined every minute." And he jerked back with his thumb, over his shoulder, in the direction of the waggon.

We turned and looked round, and saw a

meek and sad-eyed woman, with a white and haggard face, sitting on the driver's seat and leaning back against the cases and boxes which filled up the interior of the waggon. She was clad in a thin print dress, which, wet and clammy from the drops of water which dripped from the arch of the waggon-tilt over her head, clung closely around her. Pulling at this dress was a child, about three years of age, crying querulously in a low key; but the woman took no notice of it, and lay still, with her hands tightly clenched in front of her, and her eyes gazing out into vacancy. But for an occasional spasmodic contraction of the muscles of the face, and a nervous twitching of the clasped fingers, she might have been a statue of white marble, so mute and still was she; and in the gathering gloom of the evening her pale face, with its expression of unearthly pain, stood vividly out with ghost-like pallor from the dark background of the interior of the waggon.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" we both involuntarily murmured.

"It's like the dratted obstinacy o' wimmen, for her to choose such a onheard-of time for it," continued her husband, whose finer feelings had perhaps been dulled by a too frequent familiarity with such domestic episodes. "It's

playin' it oncommon low down on me, it is. What I am to do with her, with ne'er a woman, nor midwife, nor nothin' around?"

We looked at each other and felt that we were nonplussed, for what did we know concerning such matters?

"Well," at last said my friend, "I've had no experience in these things myself, so perhaps I oughtn't to offer advice. But I think it would be better if you could put her further under the tilt, out of the wet; and could make room for her to lie down."

"Lor bless you," said the husband, "she don't care nothin' for a little wettin'. She and me have often been out o' worse nights than this. Why, she's been a-sittin' like that for a matter of more'n two hours, takin' no notice of the rain nor nothin'. But are you a-goin' to cross?"

"Yes."

"All right. If you can cross in your light cart, I guess I can cross in my waggon. If the stream don't carry you away, I guess I can stand it."

"Just so. You'd better see how we get through first. We'll wait for you on the other

As I climbed up into the cart again, I stole another glance at the woman. She was sitting in the same position, with the rain trickling down her face, and the peevish child still whimpering, and pulling at her sodden dress. For a moment I thought of suggesting that we should put her in our cart, and drive her over the river to Debenish's, but then I did not know if she could be moved, or if my friend would care to have a woman in that state on his hands alone, for there was not room in the cart for three people. Besides, the waggon would cross more safely, and with less jolting than the light cart. I had always heard that men knew nothing about these matters, and were only in the way in such emergencies, so I held my peace.

We drove slowly down the rather steep incline to the water, and entered the stream. The horses, accustomed to such work, stepped slowly and carefully; the brown flood swirled around their legs, and broke in a little wave of foam against the wheels; the current was strong but the water was not deep, and we reached the further side without having had our axle-trees under water.

We stopped on the top of the bank, and

turned to look at the passage of the waggon. The oxen were started with a few cracks of the whip, and the "fore-louper" led them down to the water's edge. A little delay then occurred, for the cattle were frightened at the stream, but a few well-administered cuts drove them on, the man with the beard clambered on to the seat beside his wife, and the heavy vehicle rolled slowly across the river, the "fore-louper" leading, with the water splashing round his knees.

They had reached the middle of the stream, when a loud cry from the boy startled me. Looking up the river, I saw, sweeping round the bend about five hundred yards above the ford, a mass of brown water, rushing onward like a wall. I felt a sickening sensation of horror. Would they get through before it struck them? The man howled, yelled, and shrieked at the oxen, and made his whip whistle over their heads again and again. They broke into a trot: they would be saved. No—the "fore-louper" let go of the leaders, and ran like mad for the bank; the man with the beard threw himself out of the waggon, and tried to make for the same haven of safety; in another second the waggon would be over-

:d.

I do not want to see the catastrophe, but I cannot look away. Some horrible fascination keeps my eyes fixed on the waggon, and the white, lifeless face of the motionless woman. In a moment the mass of seething water is upon them. The oxen are swept from their feet and buried under the muddy waves. The waggon shakes and totters; but it does not upset, it is too heavily laden to turn over, even though it is broadside on to the flood—she may yet be saved. The racing waters surge into the waggon, and leap and splash nearly over the tilt, while the struggles of the drowning oxen carried onward by the torrent, with here and there a pair of horns or a head buoyed up by the wooden yoke appearing above the surface, turn it obliquely to the stream.

At last the woman moves. She is stretching out her hand; she is saying something. Good Heaven! What is it? The roar of the flood drowns her words. See! she has taken the child in her arms now. Where is the man—the husband? In my anxiety for the woman I had not given him a thought. The boy is standing near us, shivering on the bank. Coward! if he had stuck to the leaders they might have been got through. Ah! the woman

is pointing at her husband. See, that is his head away down there; now the bend hides him from view; he is swimming with the stream. She wants us to go after him; but he will no doubt be safe enough unless he gets staked on a submerged branch; anyhow he thought of himself first, and now we will think of her.

How dark it is getting! Through the sheets of falling rain I can only just distinguish the white waggon-tilt and the still whiter gleam of that pale, despairing face. Can we do nothing to help? No: no man could stem that current even for a moment.

What is that gray object above there, coming down the river? Great Heavens! it is a huge dead tree, and that is a splintered and bleached limb that we see projecting from the water. If it strikes the waggon the woman is lost indeed. How fast it comes down! I think it will pass by on this side. No, it will graze the wheels and glance off—no, an eddy has caught it; now it swirls round; it has struck. The waggon heels over, slowly, slowly, and then seems to be sucked down by the turgid flood. The child is gone. Look! That is its arm gleaming white amongst the

drowning oxen. The waggon is right over, the woman is in the water.

We rush wildly about on the bank. For a few moments we can see a white face floating on the waters, then it vanishes in the gathering gloom, and we can see no more. We run along the bank down stream, in the vain hope that some eddy may sweep her near enough for us to seize her dress; but not a sound do we hear, nor another trace do we see, of the ill-fated woman or her child.

About a mile down the river we find the man, clinging exhausted and half-drowned to a bough which sweeps the surface of the water. We draw him out, not without difficulty, and in reply to his eager questions we can only shake our heads. We lead him back to the ford, silent and with hanging head. Not a trace of the waggon is now to be seen; darkness has closed around; and the river flows on like a torrent of ink, amid the sough of the rain, and the moaning of the chill night-wind. We shiver with cold and excitement. Is all this real, or only some horrible dream?

"What is the use of staying here now? They are both dead; they are past help now. Come, let us go up to Debenish's."

VI.

SNAKES.

"THAT story ain't bad," said the one-eyed man, joining unasked in our conversation, "but I could tell you one worth two of that about another kind of snake."

We were at the bar of the "Blue Posts," New Rush, Diamond Fields, taking some light alcoholic refreshment before retiring to our tent to turn in for the night, and I had just been narrating to my partner, D——, an adventure which I had had with a puff-adder at Camps Bay. As the adventure itself had not been remarkable for exciting passages of thrilling interest, I had largely drawn upon my imagination to supply these deficiencies; and I flattered myself that I had described a situation so full
ounding and unexpected incidents, and
y verging upon the impossible, as to

defy competition. I consequently looked incredulously at this one-eyed digger, who was offering to tell a story worth two of mine.

The few men still in the bar—for the night was late for the early hours we kept at the Fields in those days, and who had been hanging with bated breath upon my lips, while I told them how I got the puff-adder out of the leg of my trousers, into which it had wriggled while I was asleep—with the proverbial fickleness of the mob, now turned from me, and dressing their faces in set expressions of the keenest interest, called upon my rival to "go ahead" and "fire away." A confirmed dipsomaniac, too, who had for some time been making spasmodic attempts to take a tumbler of fluid in his wandering hand, suddenly pulled himself together, poured the spirit down his throat, and turning towards him with a comprehensive smile, said in a semi-falsetto voice, that "he thor' the g'nleman shd 'blige hon'rble comp'ny."

The one-eyed man asked for nothing better, and being thus adjured, at once commenced.

"I ain't an Old Colony chap; I'm a Natalian, born and bred. I used to live at Camperdown, near Maritzburg, a place which

no doubt you've heard of, if you haven't seen. Well, about the end of October, a matter of two years ago, I had to go up to Maritzburg to see about a new dissel-boom for my waggon. I rode up; I had a very good horse, foaled by one of those mares that Joe Gage had down at Pinetown—mares that every one in Natal knows of, I should think.

"I don't know if you're acquainted with the road between Camperdown and Maritzburg, but I had just crossed the First Spruit, and was trotting easy along, when my horse shied, nearly chucking me; and on looking to see what was up, I saw a black mamba sliding down the hill-slope on my right. Now, the black mamba is about as nasty a snake as you'll find in Natal, and we can show as pretty a collection of those reptiles as you'll get in any country. He ain't like other snakes, what won't trouble you unless you trouble them, by treading on them or frightening them somehow; but he'll go for you, just out of pure wickedness, if you so much as happen to cross the road in front of him. I, of course, knew all about them; but this one

head about me; so I just cursed the horse a bit, and went on.

"I hadn't gone a rod before the horse began sweating and trembling all over. I thought it must be another snake, but I couldn't see one anywhere on hand, so I turned in the saddle to look at the chap I had just passed. Would you believe it, friends? There he was, not five yards off in the road, follering along as hard as he could pelt, and with his nose down, picking up the 'spoor' like a hound. I didn't feel frightened—no, not a bit. In fact, why should I? There was I, mounted; and I thought to myself that no snake that was ever hatched could keep up with a horse; so I lifted the nag a bit and trotted out, so as to get clear of the reptile and leave it behind.

"After I had gone about a quarter of a mile I looked round again—I don't know why, for I didn't expect to see anything — when s'help me if there wasn't that snake again, keeping up with me, and p'raps gaining a little. It beat all I had ever heard of; but I wasn't alarmed, not as yet, and I just cantered on, looking round to see what the snake would do.

"The first two or three strides carried me well away from him, and I was just waving my hand to him so as to say, 'So 'long, old man, sorry I can't stop,' you know, when, may I never speak again, if I didn't see that mamba curl his tail up in the air over his head, then twist his neck back, take a grip of his tail with his back teeth, and come trundling on in the road after me, for all the world just like a child's hoop.

"You can say, without error, that I was startled, in fact considerably so, and I cantered out, still keeping my eye well on the mamba He went along quite easy, running smoothly like, and it appeared as if he was enjoying the fun and didn't want to hurry himself: only, when any sharp stone, or bit of thorn in the road seemed to annoy him, he would make a spurt and come on a bit nearer.

"I got round the mountain, and was in the straight bit to Maritzburg, the mamba follering all the way at about the same distance, when I thought that the game was getting played out, and that I might just as well gallop away from him. Accordingly, I went on full pelt for about a mile, and then slowed down to give the horse a breather,

for the day was powerful hot, when hang me if the mamba didn't suddenly appear out of the cloud of dust we had kicked up, trundling along as happy as ever, only he appeared to be losing temper a bit, having got scratched, no doubt, through going faster, or p'raps being vexed at having to hurry.

"Friends! I began to feel sick then. I thought really that I should never be able to shake off the infernal thing, and I drove both spurs home, and went on again at full gallop. Still, as fast as I could go, that mamba seemed to go faster. The horse was lathered with foam; the rocks and grass at the road-side seemed to fly past me; but still that cursed black hoop came rolling along about five or six yards behind me.

"I clattered across the bridge outside Maritzburg, and raced up the street. I could see all the people running like mad into their houses, slamming their doors and shutting their downstairs windows. They had seen the mamba following me. Some of them went and took seats at the top windows of their houses, so as to have a better view of the hunt, and I thought I heard some of them giving odds on the snake. Up the

street I went like a streak of light, and the mamba, having had enough sport, no doubt, was now gaining on me every moment, and evidently meaning mischief. I was just passing the Crown Hotel, which, as p'raps you know, stands back a bit from the road, when a chap, amongst a crowd of others who were watching me from the upstairs windows, yelled out, 'Turn a corner sharp, you blamed fool. It's your only chance.'

"Friends! those words were like an inspiration. I just managed to wrench the horse's head round, and to turn down a cross street, and the mamba, seeing he would lose me, straightened himself out, made a leap, and fell short; just bit a few hairs out of the nag's tail, nothing more. I didn't stop till I'd gone a good half-mile; and then, seeing no more of the snake, I turned back. Gosh! it makes me hot to think of it now."

We remained silent at the conclusion of this strange story, and the one-eyed digger looked round at us while mopping his forehead, for he had grown warm with the recital. The awkward silence was broken by the dipsomaniac. Raising his head from the liquor-sprinkled and dirty boards which did duty

for a counter, he waved his hand graciously towards the digger, and said:

"'Pears to me, to be duty d'volved 'pon me to r'turn thanks of hon'rble comp'ny. Mo' int'resting story — mo' int'resting. Ber you hav'nt said what b'came of ole woman."

We were beginning to breathe again, with a sense of relief from restraint, when the story-teller once more spoke.

"It's a queer yarn, isn't it?" he inquired. "Sounds almost incredible, don't it?"

"Yes, it does—almost," said my partner.

"Still," continued the one-eyed digger, "it's as true as gospel—every word of it. I hope none of you don't think as I've been lying."

"Oh, no—certainly not."

"Because, if so as any one of you did think so, and would like to put words to it, we can soon see who's the best man outside."

And he began to roll up his shirt-sleeves and expose a pair of brawny, sunburnt arms.

We all believed it to be a stupendous lie; but was it worth while to incur the risk of receiving a couple of black eyes, or perhaps of being reduced to the monocular condition of this romancer, simply for the satisfaction of telling him that we considered him to have

been guilty of unmitigated mendacity? No, certainly not. Besides, had not the proverb or some deceased fogey said, "Magna est veritas et prævalebit"? Very well, then; let "veritas" manage its own business, and prevail. It was nothing to do with us. So we all agreed as we left the "Blue Posts," and went along the dusty road round the base of the "kopje" to our tents.

VII.

JIM STONE.

PART I.

"DID you ever hear tell of young Newton?
Had a claim down Du Toit's Pan way—
About him and that regular cute 'un,
Jim Stone, who came up from the Bay,*
And was up to all kinds of falutin',
From cock-fightin' to out-and-out play.

"It was early days then at the diggin's,
And the Rush was De Beer's, No. 2;†
There was none of this wire tram and riggin's,
For the Kopje,‡ you see, was just new.
I was partner along with old Higgins,
And a Melbourne gold-digger called Hugh.

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* Algoa Bay is commonly spoken of as *the* Bay.

† Two diggings were opened on the De Beer estate, close together. The second was called the New Rush, or the Colesberg Kopje.

‡ Kopje—a low hill.

"There was never a rattle-trap shanty,
All the plain was a city of tents,
And you had, sir, to lock your portmanty
If you wished to preserve the contents.
Were there women? Yes, dressed very scanty—
Korannas—one white one at Dent's.

"Well, the year must have been, I am thinkin',
'Bout the finish of seventy-one.
Bishop's Bar was the top shop for drinkin',
There the licker was flyin' like fun.
Ah! that fellow made money like winkin',
While we sweated out in the sun.

"Well, he'd got, sir, his canvas all painted,
For the tent, you must know, was a frame,
Painted over with women not sainted,
And all playin' a queer sort of game;
Though I'd bet any gal would have fainted
If you'd asked her to practise that same.

"For you never saw women look bolder,
With their petticoats up to the knee,
Puffed right out; nothin' over the shoulder,
And their legs kickin' awfully free;
Such blue eyes, and their hair shinin' golder
Than that nugget you promised to me.

"If it weren't for their flounces and trimmin',
And the way that their legs seemed to prance,
You'd have said they were goin' a-swimmin'
Instead of intendin' to dance.
I don't think there be any such women,
'Cept it may be a few, up in France.

"What! you've seen them? Well, partner, I'll bet a—
No, I see that you mean it's a fact.
Up in England, too—Well, that's a wetter.
Call it *Ballet?* They ought to be smacked.
And the parties themselves ain't much better,
Who encourage such creatures to act.

"Well, one night we'd a sort of young meetin'—
Down at Bishop's? Ah! that you may swear.
For his drinks were particular heatin',
And his pickaxes* bristled your hair—
All the fellows were drinkin' and treatin';
Jim Stone, amongst others, was there.

* A pickaxe was a mixture of Cape brandy, Pontac wine, and ginger-beer, much in vogue at the Diamond Fields.

"We'd been bothered with underhand priggin';
Ev'ry chap had lost things from his tent,
When away at the Kopje a-diggin',
And we couldn't make out where they went.
So we went on a-talkin' and swiggin',
Plannin' dodges to collar the gent.

"Had the thief done his business more plucky,
Met you out of the camp, on the flat,
Knocked you down, jumped* your swag, cut his lucky,
Why we shouldn't have minded—that's pat—
But this sneakin' about was so mucky,
That by Jingo we couldn't stand that.

"What! Police? There were none in the camp, sir—
Just a magistrate up at the Drift.†
If we caught any chap on the ramp, sir,
Then we dropped on him heavy and swift:
Put a reim‡ round the neck of the scamp, sir,
And we all lent a hand for the lift.

* In digger parlance, to "jump" meant to "steal."

† Klipdrift.

‡ A *reim* is a strip of raw ox-hide, usually used in lieu of a rope in South Africa.

"Ah, those times were the days for the diggers;
There's been nothin' to equal Judge Lynch.
Digger Law is the right sort for niggers—
Kept in order? You bet—to an inch.
Those canteen keepers cut pretty figures,*
When we brought it on them with a clinch.

"That Jim Stone was a very old bird, sir,
Had been up at the Fields from the first—
Such a liar—I give you my word, sir,
Tell you yarns till you'd think he would burst.
Never did any work that I heard, sir,
And was blessed with an evergreen thirst.

"Why, he'd tell you how he had prospected
The New Rush, before any one thought
Of dry diggin' at all. Recollected
When the chaps began building a fort—
A commando of Boers was expected
Down the river, and they would have fought.†

* In December, 1871, several canteens were burned and their contents destroyed, the owners having been accused of purchasing diamonds from Kaffirs, contrary to Digger Law.

† When diamonds were first discovered in Waterboer's

"As I've said, we were drinkin' our mixtures,
And the young artist fellow was wild,
For some chap had been foolin' his pictures,
And that always would make him get riled.
Addin' whiskers, and beards, and such fixtures
To those ballet-girls, till they were spiled.

"Well, we just were a-sittin' and talkin',
When I saw my old pal—I mean Hugh—
And a man we called Joseph, come stalkin'
Right into the bar, lookin' 'skew.
And that Joseph, no infant, went walkin'
Round the tent for a general view.

"We all saw there was somethin' the matter,
And began looking out for the fun.
Joe was bigger than me—that is, fatter—
With a fist that a bullock would stun.
So the boys stowed away all their clatter,
Just to wait till the trouble begun.

Territory, the Government of the Orange Free State claimed the whole of the diamondiferous district; and at one time it was thought that they would endeavour to obtain possession of it by force.

"'Chaps,' he said, 'we've had things disappearin',
And we never could find out the man;
But I think now the business is clearin',
And the grit showin' up in the pan.
I just want you to give me a hearin'.'
'Can you show him?' we shouted. 'I can.'

"'Well; last night from my tent there was taken
A small packet of stones*—just a few,
And this mornin', you see, I was makin'
Just a search—Mind the door, will you, Hugh?—
And as I was a-scrapin' and rakin'
I found this. Do you know it? I do.'

"Well, and what do you think he was showin'?
Why, a pipe, fashioned like a death's head.
Was but one in the Camp to our knowin',
Though they're common in England, it's said.
I saw Stone was a-puffin' and blowin',
And his face was uncommonly red.

* Diamonds.

"'Ah!' said Joseph, 'I see that you know it.
We've all seen it before times enough.'
'That's not mine,' says Jim Stone. 'Oh! now stow it;
We're not goin' to swallow that stuff.
This not yours? Where is yours? Can you show it?'
That was coming it down pretty rough.

"Then Stone's eyes, they glared out of the sockets,
And he stuck his hand into his breast,
And I thought we should really see rockets.
I remember quite well he was dressed
In a shirt running over with pockets,
And long boots polished up to the best.

"Well, he jumped, sir, right over the table—
But, says Joseph: 'My friend, you forget.
I am sorry to say we're not able
To dispense with your company yet.
That's the man, boys—his face is a label—
The most mean cuss that I ever met.'

"We made sure Stone would pull out his shooter,
And we kicked up a deuce of a rout.
But, no fear—he was very much cuter,
And he knew he was fairly bowled out.
So he just collared hold of a pewter,
And then threw it at Joe with a shout.

"Then he chuckled a queer kind of laughter,
Ripped a ballet-girl down with his knife,
Bolted through, ducking clear of the rafter,
And was gone. You may bet there was strife.
Did they catch him? No, not till months after;
Then he got in the chain-gang for life.

"What? You haven't heard much of the other?
'Bout young Newton? You wait a bit yet.
You shall have it in time, so don't bother—
I ain't likely, old man, to forget.
But this talkin' and heat's fit to smother,
And I really must go for a wet."

Part II.

"What! go on now? Well, you are a nailer—
But I'll tell you as fast as I can.
That you know, was a sailor,
Good c than a man—
Middy, mo in a whaler.
As I saic ut at the Pan.*

"Well, it s rough rough kind of
weathe
His old to the Bay,
When the ight in full feather,
And the yarns about diamonds were gay.
So the boy and a chum ran together,
And the other chap died on the way.

"Bein' green, and not up to such cunnin',
Some old loafer of course took him in:
Sold a claim that he swore was right stunnin',
That he'd only had time to begin—
Full of stones—though he thought there
weren't one in—
And so collared the young fellow's tin.

"They were mighty stuck-up, were those Panners,
Though their claims weren't a quarter worth these:
Thought they had most superior manners,
Talked of sanit'ry law, if you please.
Wouldn't 'low any dirty Korannas
Or dead cattle to poison their breeze.

"Said their camp was the gentleman's quarter,
Bragged a lot, too, about Market Square,
Where the wind always blew such a snorter:
But we chaps at De Beer's didn't care.
If it hadn't ha' been for their water,
Scarce a soul would have ever gone there.

"Well, the claim turned out regular trashy,
Just as any old hand would have thought.
A few garnets—yes, pretty, but flashy—
And some half-dozen pieces of boart.*
He'd no boys.† Being hard-up for cash he
Worked himself—good deal more than he ought.

* Inferior splints of diamonds.
† Kaffirs.

"So that things didn't look very sunny,
For I needn't say livin' was dear—
Walked away with a big pile of money—
And he hadn't brought saleable gear.
He had fancied the life was rare fun, he
Thought he'd pick up some thousands a year.

"Then that boart of his—somebody slid it.
It was buried, you see, in his tent,
So the man must have seen where he hid it,
And then watched till the young fellow went.
We all said it was Jim Stone that did it—
Said so after Long Joseph's event.

"Then it seems that he heard from his mother,
Up in England. His father was dead,
And she wrote in no end of a pother
'Cause he'd run from his ship, and she said
He'd go on from one thing to another,
And get into bad company led.

"Well, all this was a little upsettin'
For the boy—such a soft-hearted one—
What with this, and his gettin' a wettin',
And then goin' to work in the sun,
Why, it ended at last in his gettin'
Sort of fever, or such kind of fun.

"Well, one night, pretty sick, he was lyin'
In his tent, wishin' bad it was cool.
Thinkin' too, very like, he was dyin',
For a sick chap is always a fool;
With all kind of queer notions a-flyin'
'Bout his home, fit to soften a mule.

"And he thought the church bells were a-ringin',
And that he was at home, don't you know,
With the roses and things all a-clingin'
Round the cottage; the garden aglow
All with flow'rs, and the tall trees a-swingin'
Their long branches about to and fro.

"That the day was all bright and sunshiny,
And the bees all a-hummin' like mad;
That the creepers and such were all twiny,
Just the same as when he was a lad.
Then his eyes 'gan to pump up the briny,
And the foolish young fellow felt bad.

"That he saw his old mother a-sittin'—
Silver hair, don't you know, and a cap—
With the needles and cetra for knittin',
And her hands folded down in her lap;
Goin' to make, p'raps, a sock or a mitten,
Or some fakement of that kind, old chap.

"And he thought that the breeze was a-blowin'
All the smell of the flow'rs in the door;
That the cows in the fields were a-lowin',
That the cat was asleep on the floor;
And he thought—but, old man, there's no knowin'
All the rest, but he thought a lot more.

"How I know what he thought of? Well, Ritters,
P'raps you know I'm a soft sort of cuss,
And so children, and dogs, and such critters
Come to me when they've got in a muss;
(Yes, I'll have just a notion of bitters)
And he told me when I was his nuss.

"Well, he thought of all what I've been sayin',
And was cussin' himself for a flat,
And for leavin' his ship and a-strayin',
'Fore he really knew what he was at.
And perhaps, too, the youngster was prayin',
For I've heard that some young 'uns do that.

"That same night was particular hazy,
Not a star winkin' up in the sky.
He was lyin', half-sleepy, half-lazy,
When he heard some one comin' quite sly;
And he thought that he must be real crazy,
For he saw that Jim Stone standin' by.

"Yes, sir! Standin' as cool as a 'cumber,
Just as cheeky and calm as the dooce,
As if no one weren't wantin' his number,
Or there weren't such a thing as a noose.
Well, that boy, sir, was never struck dumber,
Still half thinkin' his slates must be loose.

"Says Jim Stone: 'I'm afraid I'm intrudin';
But I heard that you weren't very well—
Been a good deal a-frettin' and broodin',
Got the fever, too, on for a spell—
Pretty empty—no licker nor food in—
And no di'monds nor nothin' to sell.

"'Don't you move, for I shan't stop a jiffey,
But I want just to do the square thing.
Things for me look uncommonly squiffy,
And I guess I've near finished my fling,
For I've been, don't you know, a bit riffy,
And I 'spect before long I shall swing.

"'It was me jumped your swag—don't go squealin'—
And I sold it right down at the Drift;
Didn't get very much by the dealin',
But I've brought you this here as a gift;
For I've got, lad, a rum sort o' feelin',
That I owe you a kind of a lift.'

"Then he dropped a pouch down on the ground, sir,
And was gone 'fore the youngster could speak.
Well, how much do you think that he found, sir,
In that pouch? Sixty pounds to a squeak.
It was all of it stole, I'll be bound, sir,
For that Stone was an out-and-out sneak.

"Worth the boart? Oh! that wasn't worth fifty,
Hardly forty—'twas nothing to brag.
It was strange that a fellow so shifty
As that Stone, should have stumped up the swag.
Just a week after that, at the Drift, he
Was caught making off with a nag.

"The young fellow next mornin' was wusser,
So I doctored him up, and he told
Me this yarn, in no end of a fuss, sir;
Didn't know what to do with the gold.
But I told him to stick to the purse, sir,
And he did—he was very near holed.

"He went home to his family, later.
Yes, that's all—it ain't much of a tale,
But it shows that in every man's nater
There's some good, though he's down in the scale.
I say, boss, will you pass me that grater?
I like nutmeg a lot in my tail."*

* A Diamond Field abbreviation for cock-tail.

THE DRAMA AT D'URBAN.

At the termination of the Zulu War in 1879, I went down from Pietermaritzburg to D'Urban, to embark in the Currie steamer *Taymouth Castle* for England. I had about two days to wait at D'Urban before the sailing of the vessel, and learning that there was a dramatic company in the town whose performances were reported to be highly entertaining, though not at all in the sense intended by the eminent tragedians who composed it, I went one evening to look on.

The piece was *Hamlet*, and the performance was held in a long, low, one-storied building to the north of the town, near the railway station, the name of which, that is if it has any distinguishing name, I have now forgotten. The orchestra consisted of a cornet and two clarionets, lent by the band of the regiment

which was still under canvas on the D'Urban Flats. I had a seat on the second bench. On the first bench, immediately in front of me, were two very young subalterns, between whom sat a lady of great personal attractions, who gave herself out to be the wife of an officer of one of the innumerable corps of irregular horse. This so-called husband was apparently a man of the world, who knew how to live and let live, and troubled himself but little about the doings of his spouse; but might every night be seen, attired in a blue Norfolk jacket, adorned with two rows of ribands, which were said by the wearer to be various foreign orders, engaged in playing pool with novices in the billiard-room of a certain hotel, while his wife was admiring the moon, the Southern Cross, or the constellations generally with some male ardent astronomer.

To return to the subject after this digression. The curtain rose, and discovered to the eager audience a dusty sheet suspended across the stage. The stage was supposed to be the platform before the castle, and the sheet the wall of the Castle of Elsinore itself. It was ingenious in its way, but scenery of this kind leaves a good deal for the imagination to do.

The piece commenced. A gentleman in soiled tights, who answered to the name of 'Oratio, spoke a few mutilated lines, and behold, the ghost stalked in solemnly. And such a ghost! The tragedian who had undertaken this difficult rôle was wrapped in a sheet, on his head was an ordinary infantry foreign-service helmet, round and over which hung in graceful folds a green Derby veil. He stalked forward with solemn strides, holding stiffly before him his right hand, and in that right hand was clutched a policeman's truncheon.

This ridiculous make-believe of a ghost was too much for the attractive lady and the two young subalterns, and they laughed openly, and a little loudly. Cries of "Silence"—"We can't hear"—"Too much noise" at once rose from the ranks of the unsophisticated Natalians behind, who were watching with eager eyes and rapt attention the progress of the piece; while 'Oratio, breaking off his dialogue, came forward and said: "If you don't be'ave yourselves you'll be turned out."

The giddy trio in front at once stifled their laughter, and the play went on. They nearly laughed when the cock-crow was performed by a lank actor in the side-wings,

but restrained themselves, and harmony prevailed.

Scene 2 disclosed to our admiring eyes a tattered canvas, which, portraying as it did the interior of a modern drawing-room, served naturally excellently well as a room of state in the Castle of Elsinore. The King and Queen, with tinsel crowns and cashmere dressing-gowns, occupied the centre of the stage. The other tatterdemalions were grouped around. Polonius, however, was the cynosure of all eyes. The wardrobe of the company being, perhaps, limited, and there being no coiffeur, he had fastened on to his upper lip two long flakes of white cotton-wool, of which one drooped gracefully over his mouth, whilst the other persisted in stretching itself out in a wild endeavour to reach his ear. He wore an ordinary pair of men's drawers, and a spangled cincture such as is usually worn by street acrobats. The giddy trio again exploded into laughter at this apparition, and again angry cries of "Silence!" were raised by those behind; while one could see that the tragedians, with that sensitiveness to and impatience of criticism which is so typical of histrionic talent, were becoming seriously annoyed.

Hamlet, or rather 'Amlet, a lantern-jawed man with an enormous nose, wore a pair of black velvet knickerbockers, a frilled shirt, and a dark maroon table-cloth, which hung from his shoulders. This scene was galloped through, as was also Scene 3, where Ophelia was represented by a short, stout, and rubicund lady, whose locks glistened with a recent application of pomade, and who was evidently about to increase the number of Her Majesty's lieges. We got through Scene 4 without accident, though there was nearly another explosion when 'Amlet struggled with his companions, and ejaculated:

> My fate do make each hartery of this body
> Has 'ardy as the Marine lion's nerves—
> Soho—I am called. Un'and me gents.

and again when he rhapsodised:

> O hall you 'ost of 'eaven. O hearth—What helse.
> Shall I hadd 'ell—O lor—'old 'old, my 'eart.

The whole of Act ii. was omitted, and we proceeded to Scene 2 of Act iii., the Play Scene, the modern drawing-room again serving as the Castle Hall. A line spoken by 'Amlet after lying down at Ophelia's feet caused the attrac-

tive lady to titter and hide her face behind her fan, while the two subalterns exchanged winks, and a puritanical Natalian in a back seat shouted: "Shame! There's young gals here." But the funniest part of the Play Scene was that there were no Players. The lantern-jawed Prince of Denmark lay at the feet of the matronly Ophelia, and flourished a Japanese fan; while unseen persons at the wings read the parts of the Player King and Queen, each point being emphasized by 'Amlet, who rapped the stage with his fan, and winked at the audience.

This tried the risible faculties of the three in front of me very severely, and at the critical moment when the King and all his ragged attendants sprang to their feet, they laughed long and loudly. A tremendous uproar at once broke out from the back seats. "Silence—we can't hear. Turn them out. Keep quiet," were shouted by twenty voices. Polonius seized the opportunity for revenge. Advancing to where the footlights ought to have been, he raised a forefinger, shook it threateningly at the guilty three, and thus addressed them:

"If your intellect be so low that you can't appreciate the beauties of the divine William,

you at hall events ought to keep quiet, so that them as does appreciate can 'ear."

"Hear! hear!" roared the audience.

Polonius continued: "You have interrupted the progression of this masterpiece of the tragic muse already more than once to-night." Then he waved his hand towards the impatient audience. "Turn 'em hout."

In an instant some thirty burly Natalians were climbing over the benches, and hurrying towards the culprits. The lady appeared frightened, while the two subalterns inflated their chests, scowled upon their aggressors, and prepared to hit out. But resistance was futile. The lady was hurriedly run towards the door, and the two subs. were borne aloft, kicking, screaming, and cursing, to the same egress. There they were gently let down to the ground, for the crowd did not want to hurt them, and left swearing.

As I was doubtful if I should be able to restrain my laughter any longer, and as I did not wish to be so summarily ejected, I too left the room as soon as order was restored. Outside I found the lady laughing, and taking the whole thing as a joke; but the two warriors were exceedingly indignant, talking about the

insult to the service, and blustering. They expressed an intention of going to the camp on the Flats, and getting some "fellows" to come and wreck the infernal theatre, but I tried to soothe them; and when the lady asked them to go home and take supper with her, their belligerent intentions entirely evaporated.

THE PHANTOM WAGGON.

On the southern edge of the great Karroo, between Patatas River and Zout Kloof, is situated a bleak and desolate tract, commonly known as the "Spoek," or Haunted Country, which is popularly believed to be the peculiar resort of ghosts and demons, who certainly have, in their selection of this locality, exhibited a remarkable want of taste. The supernatural visitors said to have been met with in this district are various, but the apparition most frequently seen is a spectral waggon, which, with phantom mules or horses, and phantom drivers, rushes furiously across the "veldt" in the still hours in the morning just preceding daybreak.

The tales concerning this Phantom Waggon are numerous and varied; and on two occasions I have met men who asserted, with

every appearance of good faith, that they had actually seen it. On the second occasion, the waggon in which I was travelling was outspanned a little distance beyond the farm-house at Patatas River. It was a pitch-dark night; a low, moaning breeze, which struck rather cold, swept across the dreary plain, and we, the passengers, were gathered round a glowing fire of ox-chips, talking and smoking. At a distance of some six hundred yards was another outspan. The shadows of the men sitting or moving round its fire were flung in grotesque and gigantic shapes across the zone of stony ground lighted up by the flickering flames; while, borne gently down to our ears, and softened and beautified by the distance and the sobbing of the wind, came the strains of a violin, not at all badly played, and the voices of three or four white men singing some pathetic Christy Minstrel air.

There was something peculiarly subduing in all this. We may glorify as we like man's mind, and talk as we will of its independence, yet there can be no doubt that it is more affected by local surroundings than we would care to confess. Every one is acquainted with the feeling of depression caused by gloomy

weather, and the fact that the month of November in London is that in which by far the greater number of suicides occur, shows how atmospherical conditions, at all events, influence the mind.

Probably, then, it was the opaque darkness of the night, in which the eye sought vainly to penetrate, the wailing sound of the light wind, the sense of being lost, as it were, in the dense blackness and the vast solitude of the plain, coupled with the half-awakened sadness caused by the distant music, which seemed to recall some dim recollection of a past longing or a past sorrow, that caused the conversation, already carried on in low tones, to turn upon death-omens, ghosts, and all the stock-in-trade generally of the supernatural.

An Englishman of middle age led the way by narrating a curious coincidence of which he had heard—of thirteen people having sat down to dinner on a Christmas Day, and of the man who rose first from the table having died before twelve months had elapsed. All of us had heard of this old superstition, and we began to discuss the relative probability as to one person out of any given thirteen dying before a given time; but a bagman from

Manchester, who was known to us by the name of Simpson, but whose Mosaic features betrayed his nationality under the disguise of an assumed Anglo-Saxon cognomen, was full of high-souled scorn and derision at the idea of any one believing for a moment in any such ridiculous nonsense.

He proceeded to cross-examine the Englishman.

"Was you present at thish dinner?" he inquired.

"No, I wasn't there."

"Then how do you know anything about it?"

"A brother of mine who was at the dinner told me."

"How do you know he wasn't telling you a lie?"

"My brothers don't lie."

"Then they don't take after you," replied the bagman, bursting into a loud, but forced, laugh of incredulity.

We became really afraid that unpleasantness would occur, for the Englishman did not appear provided with any further stock of patience, while the bagman seemed to be entirely unconscious of his critical situation.

"If you mean to call me a liar," said the Englishman, "say so, and I'll know what to do."

We trembled at the prospect of a passage of arms between these two antagonists at this hour of the night. We were lazy, drowsy, and, moreover, subdued by the surroundings which I have described. We did not want to be disturbed or shaken up by any pugilistic encounter. Fortunately the peace was preserved by an interposition.

"I can tell you of something queer, that you can't explain away, and which I saw with my own eyes," interposed a man of about fifty years of age, whose beard, of a red-brown hue, was plentifully streaked with gray, and whom from his attire, for he wore the usual felt hat and moleskins of the colony, we supposed to be an Africander. We knew him in the waggon by the name of Lutterodt; but that might, or might not, be his real name.

Being all desirous of peace, and glad of this diversion, we eagerly pressed our man to unfold his horrid tale. In the clamour of voices, that of the bagman, if indeed he was enunciating any retort to his adversary, was drowned, and in the calm of a restored harmony

our Africander friend held forth. I cannot guarantee that the following are the actual words he used. In fact I am not acquainted with shorthand, and I did not attempt to take down his narrative as it fell from his lips, but I am certain that the gist of it is preserved in what follows.

"A matter of some eight years ago, I was travelling in the post-cart from Ceres to Beaufort West. It was in November, towards the end of it, as far as I remember. There was in the cart, besides me and the driver, old Serrurier of Conrader's Fontein, and a Cape Town man who had come up to Ceres from Darling Bridge. I had the seat next the driver; the other two sat behind. The driver was Anthony de Heer.

"We had some slight accident to one of the wheels, I forget exactly what it was—the box damaged in going too quickly over a sluit, or something of that kind—and at nightfall we stopped at this very place, Patatas River, to patch it up. At about three next morning we started again. It was a bright starlight night, and bitterly cold. We wrapped ourselves in our karosses, and went off into a half-doze in the cart, being wakened up every now and

then as we were swung from side to side when jolting over the stones and ruts. We were soon in the middle of the Spoek country, which we shall pass through to-morrow.

"We were all nodding in our seats, dreaming no doubt of comfortable beds, when the cart suddenly stopped short, nearly throwing us out. We thought there was something in the way, and looked ahead; but there was nothing to be seen. 'What's up?' I asked of Anthony, who was cursing and swearing at the horses. 'D—d if I know,' said he. 'I didn't pull them up. They stopped dead short of themselves.' I held the reins while he got down to see if there was anything wrong with the harness, and then, as it was found all right, we got ready to start again. At first the horses wouldn't move, and kept backing; but a few cuts with the whip brought them to their senses, and off we went once more.

"We went along for some half-a-mile all right, when suddenly they stopped short again. Anthony began cursing, when I thought I heard the sound of wheels, and stopped him to listen. True enough, over to our right we heard the cracking of a whip, the cries of a driver, and the rumble of wheels coming fast

towards us. 'There's a waggon coming,' said I; 'you'd best draw to one side, or they'll run into us.' 'It's off the road,' said Anthony. 'The road goes straight ahead, and the waggon's over here to our right.'

"True enough it was, as our ears told us. It was coming along at a furious rate on a dark night, over stones, rocks, and bushes, where a man could hardly drive forty yards in the daytime, out of a walk, without smashing something. 'Runaway, p'raps,' said the man from Cape Town. Presently we saw the white waggon-tilt looming up in the gloom, to our right a good deal, but still to our front. It seemed to be coming straight towards us. The noise it made was something astonishing—it was like a thunder-clap echoing amongst the hills.

"In a few seconds we could see the mules, ten, twelve, fourteen of them, with heads down, tearing along at full gallop, and a mass of foam and steam. They were about a hundred yards off, and coming straight at us. 'Where the hell are you going to?' shouted Anthony. A loud yell came from the waggon. 'To hell;' and then followed a burst of devilish laughter that made my blood run cold. Anthony lashed

the horses to make them move out of the way, but they would not stir, and stood there trembling and snorting, with their manes bristling like a hyæna's. In another second the waggon would be into us. We sprang out like lightning, and ran back.

"On came the leading mules. Their heads nearly touched the cart when they swerved off, and the whole span, with the waggon leaping after them, shot past us by a hair's breadth. As they went by, there came the coldest blast of air that I have ever felt. It made us feel as if our blood had been turned into ice; and, just as the waggon was passing us, the driver turned his head round to us and pushed back his hat. Good Heavens! what a face was that we saw. It was no Tottie who was driving. It was the face of a white man, ghastly pale, like that of a corpse, and the jaws were tied up with a white cloth. The eyes seemed to look us through and through. Just as the waggon passed came another yell of devilish laughter from inside the waggon, and then was dead silence. All in a second the crash, rattle, and rumble ceased and not a sound was to be heard. At the same moment the waggon disappeared

"We looked at each other astounded. Anthony was shivering. 'It's the Phantom Waggon of the Spoek,' said he. 'I've heard of it often enough; but never expected to see it.' We said that was nonsense, that the waggon had probably suddenly stopped, and we ran into the veldt to look for it; but not a trace of it could we discover anywhere. We were coming back to where we had left Anthony with the cart, when a bright light suddenly shone out a little way off, and we saw a camp fire, with two men sitting by it. We ran towards it, thinking to clear up the mystery, when the two men got up, turned their ghastly faces on us, and disappeared. At the same moment the fire went out. We felt the ground; but it was quite cold, and there were no embers, ashes, or any traces of a fire at all.

"We went back to the cart. Anthony seemed very gloomy. We knew the reason, for we knew the old story about the Phantom Waggon. It is that it charges right down upon any cart, or vehicle of any kind it comes across. If no one challenges it, it smashes right into it, and all inside are doomed; but if any one challenges, that man saves the others

at the expense of himself, for he is bound to die within a week. We tried to cheer Anthony up, telling him it was all humbug, though after what we had just seen we didn't really think so, and said that what we had seen was very likely a spectral illusion of the same kind as I have heard the Hartz demon described to be. But we were half-hearted about it, and when Anthony said that no spectral illusion caused by shadows on a mist or anything of that kind could make the noises we had heard, even if the morning had been misty, which it wasn't, we felt there was nothing more to be said. Poor fellow, he felt very bad about it, thinking of his wife and children at Ceres whom he had only left the morning before."

Here the narrator paused.

"Did the driver pull through after all?" said some one.

"No. Poor Anthony! On the back journey he somehow had an accident in Hottentot's Kloof. It was a strange thing, for he was known to be a good and careful driver. He and the cart and horses were found all smashed to atoms at the bottom of a ravine. He must have driven right over the precipice."

A solemn silence followed the termination

of the story. It was interrupted by the Hebrew bagman, Simpson.

"You don't suppose we're going to believe such a lot of infernal bosh as that, do you?" he inquired.

"I didn't tell the story for your benefit," replied Lutterodt. "You can believe it or not, as you like. But what I've said I'm prepared to swear to."

"Been on the booze, p'raps—going to have D.T.," continued the bagman.

No reply.

"I should have liked to have been there," he remarked to the circle generally. "I'd have liked to try the effect of a leaden pill out of this little persuader on the pasty-faced driver of the mules," and he drew from his inner breast-pocket a small revolver.

"I wonder you carry weapons," interposed the Englishman. "You seem so extra plucky you might have got along without them, especially as other folk do."

"Ah!" said the bagman. "You see I ain't a beggarly digger. I've got property to defend."

The Englishman sprang to his feet. He stigmatised the bagman as a condemned,

unbelieving Jew, desired him to come on and be blanked, and at the same time promised that, should he respond to this invitation, he would proceed to place him in a condition in which he would at once require the services of a skilled oculist and an experienced dentist. We at once interposed. To do the bagman justice, he did not appear at all inclined to disturb the harmony of the outspan by a resort to a vulgar trial of strength; so we desired him to go and sleep in the waggon, and to leave us alone. So he went, soliloquising aloud about "blanked bosh," "set of old women," "believe in any blanked humbug."

When he had gone we discussed the story, appealing to the narrator on various points. We gathered from him that no mortal eye had ever looked upon the contents of the Phantom Waggon; that it was supposed by some to contain a complement of demons let loose on temporary duty from below, while others were of opinion that it contained the spectres of those who had been destroyed by it, and who, exulting in the prospect of other unfortunat meeting with the fate that had been gave vent to the mocking and laughter which was always h

one after the other yawned, and pipe after pipe fell from relaxing lips, conversation gradually ceased, and, wrapped in our karosses or rugs, we lay with our feet to the fire, and slept as soundly on the hard ground as if we had been couched on feather beds.

About three in the morning the guard came and shook us up. We struggled to our feet, yawned, stretched, grumbled at being disturbed, and stumbled towards the waggon, into which we climbed. The night wind seemed colder than ever, and we huddled together and endeavoured to renew our broken slumbers. On we went over the dark and desolate plain. Strange sounds and cries came up from the dim distance, the cries of night birds, or of nocturnal animals prowling over the veldt.

Said Lutterodt, "We are in the Spoek now."

"D—d bosh," muttered the bagman.

After about an hour a pale gray light appeared in the distant east; the stars grew dim and the light breeze freshened and grew colder. Suddenly we heard in front of us the distant cracking of a whip, and the sound of wheels. We looked at each other, thinking of the story of the previous night.

"It was just about here," said Lutterodt in a sepulchral voice, "that the Phantom Waggon came on us."

I looked at the bagman. He was very pale. He tried to laugh; but the lips would only form a sickly smile. The Englishman and Lutterodt exchanged glances.

"Look here, gentlemen," said the latter, "one of us has got to challenge, or we are all lost. Who will volunteer to do it?"

No answer.

"As you don't believe in ghosts or my story," he continued, turning to the bagman, "perhaps you will?"

"No, I shan't."

The rattle and crash drew nearer and nearer; but the approaching waggon was still at some distance. Our driver pulled up and drew to one side. The Englishman and Lutterodt again exchanged glances. Then the latter, who was on the seat behind that on which the bagman sat, suddenly rose and pinned his arms from behind; while the former, who was in front of him, leant back, drew the revolver from his breast-pocket, cocked it, and pointed it at his head.

"Challenge at once, you unbelieving Jew,"

he cried, "or, by God, I'll blow your brains out."

The bagman turned as white as a sheet. "You daren't do it. It's murder—you'll be hanged. For God's sake, gentlemen, protect me. You won't see me murdered in cold blood. Guard, I appeal to you."

"What's the use?" said the guard. "We shall all be in blue blazes in a minute, if you don't shout."

"Will you challenge?" demanded the Englishman.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I daren't. Let some one else do it. I'll give any one five pounds to do it."

"Make it ten," said the guard, "and I'm on. A chap can only die once."

"All right, give it him, give it him. There are notes in my pocket-book."

The Englishman took a pocket-book from the bagman's coat, removed some dirty Standard Bank notes, and handed them to the guard. Then the prisoner was released. By this time the approaching waggon could be dimly discerned through the darkness, some sixty yards off. As it drew near the guard made his way

to the front of the waggon, and, when it was a few yards from us, shouted "Hi."

"Hullo!" came the reply.

"Is that you, Jim?" asked the guard.

"Yes, old pal. How are you getting on?"

"First rate. Just earned the cheapest tenner I ever got."

The other waggon rolled on, passed us, and was lost in the obscurity behind.

"That was our down waggon," said the guard to the Englishman. "I knew we ought to pass it about here."

X.

THE TRAGEDY OF SEA-COW FARM.

CONNECTING the peninsula of the Table Mountain Range, which forms that which is commonly known as the Cape of Good Hope, with the mainland of South Africa, are the Cape Flats, averaging in breadth, from Table Bay to Simon's Bay, from nine to twelve miles, and perhaps some thirty in length. On the southern side they are overlooked by Table Mountain and the Devil's Peak, with the fir-woods of Mowbray, Rondebosch, and Wynberg, and the vineyards of Constantia, lying at their feet; while on the side of the mainland are the mountains of Paarl, Stellenbosch, and Hottentot's Holland.

The Flats are, as their name betokens, a plain, raised but little above the level of the ocean, and covered with Cape heath. Low ranges of sand-hills trend across them, and in

the more low-lying portions are found vleys, bordered with tall swaying rushes, the home of various water-fowl. Here and there, near some of the larger vleys, or where the soil seems capable of bearing a scanty crop of mealies or sweet potatoes, a Dutch house, or a hut, may be discovered; each generally with a row of gaunt and stunted fir-trees standing beside it, all of which lean and point in one direction, through the force of the prevalent south-easterly gales. In the South African spring-time, the Flats are covered with acre upon acre of flowers of every conceivable hue. Hundreds of green and gold sugar-birds (nectariniæ) skim from blossom to blossom, and the nests of the orange and black Kaffir-finch droop over the vleys from the ends of the branches of the overhanging bushes. In the spring the Flats is the garden of the world.

In that portion of the plain near Cape Town, and lying in the sweep of the shore forming Table Bay, is a lagoon called the Salt River, separated from the sea by a narrow strip of white beach, over which, during high tides, the waters of the South Atlantic pour into the lagoon. Close at hand

runs the railway to Wellington across the Flats, and adjoining the narrow railway bridge over the road is a cluster of small houses, including a miserable inn and a windmill or two. These buildings stand at the edge of the shallow sheet of water lying between the railway embankment and the sea-shore, and at low water the inhabitants enjoy the prospect of some half-a-mile of mud flat, the monotony of which surface is broken by an occasional black and rotting post standing out of the mire. The tall Kaffir crane wades about in the liquid mud, the sea-gull lazily flaps its wings over the still waters, and clouds of plover and sandpipers skim from mud-bank to mud-bank, secured from the intrusion of any local sportsman with his old-fashioned fowling-piece, by the dangerous quicksands which are said to abound in the Salt River.

About sunset on a day towards the end of June, year unknown, an individual might have been observed leaving the small shop near the railway arch, and striking across the Flats away from the sea. As a matter of fact, he was so observed by some little Dutch urchins playing about in the road, and who exhibited a sad want of that respect which is

acknowledged to be due to years, by putting out their tongues at the individual's back, and by shouting after him when they were assured he was beyond ear-shot. I am bound to explain that this conduct is not ordinary with Dutch children. It was in this case a mark of their contempt for the individual, who was called Peter Jackson, and who, from his strange misanthropic habits, was known and regarded by the inhabitants of Salt River as a "character."

The man was apparently about fifty years of age, tall and broad-shouldered, with his face, neck, and hands tanned to a red-brown colour from long exposure to the sun and weather. To the outward eye he was not cleanly to look upon. His unkempt hair straggled in a wild disorder from beneath a felt hat which had once been black, but which had now adopted the green-gray hue of venerable age. His coat and trousers, of the inevitable moleskin, were ragged and dirty. His flannel shirt, his only other garment, if not equally ragged, was at all events equally dirty, and his *veldt-schoe*
patched and torn in a dozen places.
hastily forward, talking aloud to
occasionally stopping to gestic

direction of a small group of firs, whose dark foliage loomed up indistinctly in the distance, in the failing light of evening.

The weather seemed threatening. The dense white clouds which covered the flat summit of Table Mountain, rolling one upon another from the direction of False Bay, showed that the south-easter was rising on that side of the peninsula; and the dark and overcast aspect of the sky foretokened the near approach of rain. Numerous pools of water dotted the plain, and the bell-like tinkle of thousands of frogs sounded far and near, sometimes all dying away but the louder notes of some giant batrachian, and then the chorus being again taken up by the myriads of speckled denizens of the marshes, who were rejoicing together at the prospect of a wet night. There was no road, nor even a vestige of a track; but the man undeviatingly held his course towards the firs, trampling under foot many a choice specimen of heath which would have delighted the heart of a floriculturist of a northern clime; and only turning aside to avoid some of the larger vleys, from the reeds on the verge of which would now and then arise the plaintive cry of some water-bird, disturbed by his hasty passage.

After about an hour's walking the man crossed the old road to Hottentot's Holland, heavy with sand, and the forms of the fir-trees, pointing their long bony fingers to the north-west, loomed up suddenly. Passing through a gap in a rude hedge of prickly-pear and sugar-bush, he traversed a small patch of cultivated ground, intersected by a deep and narrow vley, and approached a hut which stood on a low sand-hill, surrounded by a few bushes of acacia. All was dark and silent. No welcome light gleamed from the only window, the fractures in the panes of which were roughly closed with strips of paper or pieces of rag; and no smoke ascending from the chimney of baked clay gave any signs of life in the solitary dwelling.

As the man drew near to the hut, the loud barking of a dog sounded from the interior, which was changed to a whimper and a scratching at the door as soon as the animal recognised the footsteps; and, directly the door was opened, a rough mongrel terrier bounded forth. It leaped up to lick its owner's hand, but being saluted by a kick, at once slunk behind his heels, and subsided. The man entered the hut and closed the door. It consisted of but one room, in which stood

a grimy bedstead that had been broken and repaired in many places. A crippled table, a wooden locker, two shelves and two chairs completed the remainder of the furniture. Standing in the large Dutch fire-place was a three-legged iron pot; and heaped up in one corner of the room was a supply of fuel.

Striking a light, the inhabitant of this lone dwelling ignited some dry sugar-bush pods on the hearth, threw on some donny balls and fragments of wood, and a cheerful flame soon roared up the chimney, throwing out bright gleams on to the mud floor. Next he prepared some coffee in a battered tin pot, took from one of the shelves a hunch of bread, some biltonge and a piece of goat's-milk cheese, and made a Lucullan repast. This done, he drew a chair up in front of the fire, took down from a nail in the wall a long porcelain pipe, methodically filled and lighted it, and, resting his elbows on his knees, and his head between his hands, slowly puffed forth clouds of smoke and gazed vacantly into the fire. The long threatening rain was now falling heavily outside, and large drops, making a way down the wide chimney, hissed on the hot embers beneath, and at times

almost threatened to extinguish the fire. The dog lay on the floor near the man's chair, with its head between its fore-paws, blinking at the fire, and no sound was heard but the steady sough of the rain outside, the pattering and hissing of the drops on the hearth, and the low moan of the rising wind murmuring round the eaves of the solitary hut.

The man was an enigma. Some ten years ago he had first made his appearance on the Flats, and had built the hut which he now occupied. He was then a hale and strong man of about forty. From the commencement he had coldly received all the friendly advances of his few and sparsely-scattered neighbours, and, as a consequence, they had felt annoyed, and had, after a time, left him alone. To account for his strange demeanour, numerous reports at first gained currency concerning him. According to one he was a maniac, who sought solitude so that he might have no opportunities for gratifying his passion for homicide; according to another he was a criminal escaped from justice, perha
the neighbouring Government est
at Robben Island; while a thi
that he was weighed down w

for some horrible and undetected crime. But as years passed by and no police officers appeared on the scene, while no one in the neighbourhood mysteriously disappeared or was found barbarously murdered, these rumours died a natural death. How the man lived nobody knew or cared. Still, as it was obvious that the cultivation of a few sweet potatoes and a small patch of mealies would not supply him with the necessaries of life, it was generally supposed that he had some money somewhere. The proprietor of the shop at Salt River did indeed, on one occasion, endeavour to obtain some definite information on this head from the man himself, but received such replies to his questions that he never ventured to allude to the subject again. In revenge he narrated the occurrence, with various emendations, to his other customers, who were not displeased to find that their original view as to the unsociable and sullen character of the newcomer did credit to their discernment.

One day, however, about three years before the opening of our history, as Johannus Strydom, a young Dutchman, was passing near Jackson's hut on his way to Rondebosch, he

heard a woman's voice raised in song. The father of Johannus owned and lived on a small property about three miles to the west of Jackson's hut, called Sea-cow Farm, and so named because on it was a vley full of the narrow but deep holes caused by the wallowing of hippopotami, or "Sea-cows," in years long bygone. Phlegmatic as are Dutchmen as a rule, the shock of surprise was so great that young Strydom nearly fell from his pony. Then, with great presence of mind, he turned that animal's head towards the hut, boldly intending to solve the mystery. Perhaps the fact that he had passed the misanthropic Peter, engaged with an antiquated fowling-piece in the chase of some wild-fowl on a large vley some two miles away, was not altogether lost sight of in coming to this conclusion. He observed various signs of improvement. A small white curtain hung over the window, and the door-step appeared to have been swept.

The young Dutchman rode up to the door. At the sound of the horse's hoofs, a young woman, undeniably pretty, with smiling black eyes, a coquettish nose, and a charming mouth, appeared. Johannus doffed his large felt hat.

"Oh! I came to see if Mr. Jackson was

in," he murmured apologetically, in his very best English.

The black-eyed lady smiled sweetly.

"My husband is out," she said. "Didn't you see him as you were coming? He went over that side."

Johannus blushed. "No, I didn't see him. And how do you know which way I came?"

It was the charmer's turn to blush, which she did very prettily.

"Ah," said she, with a sigh. "It is very quiet here, and I've been watching you for quite a long time. One sees people so seldom here."

"That is very true, but you have not been here long."

"No—only a week, but it seems months. It's awfully slow here."

"You must allow us to know you," said Johannus gallantly. "I am sure my mother and my sisters will be delighted to have you for a neighbour—and so shall I too."

Mrs. Jackson laughed. "Won't you come in?" she inquired. "It isn't much of a place, but I can find you a chair."

Johannus hesitated. He half turned to

throw his leg across his pony, when he thought better of it.

"Thank you very much, but I have some things to buy at Rondebosch, and I must be back to dinner. Perhaps I shall see you on the way back. Good-bye."

On his way back about noon, young Strydom did so contrive that he should pass by Jackson's hut, though that was not the nearest way to his own home. As he drew near he saw the misanthrope, standing with arms akimbo in the doorway, looking out.

"Good morning," he ventured. "Did you have any sport?" The misanthrope turned on his heel, entered the hut, and closed the door, without vouchsafing a word in reply. "D——d Englishman," murmured the young Dutchman, as the colour rose to his sunburned cheek. "A nice time your wife will have of it, I should think."

Johannus's report when he reached home was received with incredulity. "Who would marry such a baboon of a man?" inquired the female members of the family. "It is impossible." Yet as, after all, it was perhaps just possible that Johannus was not lying, and he seemed very earnest in what he said, they

determined to have the cart out and go over next day to see. They returned from this visit with their usual equanimity sadly disturbed. Mr. Jackson had behaved rudely. Did they like Mrs. Jackson? Oh, yes, Mrs. Jackson was very nice, but—and the usual little depreciatory corollary followed. She was too young for that old baboon; she seemed giddy, too. Fortunately she was not good-looking, or she might lead him a pretty dance; but, as it was, no man would care to look at her twice.

Other neighbours, more or less distant, now made renewed attempts to establish friendly intercourse with Jackson; but without success. In fact that peculiar individual, a few days after the ladies of the Strydom family had honoured his humble abode, appeared at Sea-cow Farm, and, perfectly unembarrassed, stated that he would be much obliged if they wouldn't trouble to come again. He and his wife, he said, didn't want to know any one. The young ladies were outraged by this insult. Old Vrow Strydom, however, a pious old dame who knew the Old Testament by heart, conceived it her duty to give him some advice; but in the

middle of a disquisition concerning the inadvisability of restricting a young woman from all female society, into which, by a reference to Bathsheba and the unfortunate Uriah, she neatly dove-tailed the dangers which beset an elderly husband, he turned his back and walked out of the house.

All intercourse, however, with the newcomer was not entirely cut off. On more than one occasion, Johannus found that business of some kind took him past the Jacksons' dwelling, invariably, strange to say, on days when the master of that establishment was elsewhere; and on one occasion, when her husband had gone into Cape Town for the day, Mrs. Jackson suddenly appeared at Seacow Farm. She was received hospitably, if not cordially, for the growing intimacy between herself and the Strydom son and heir had not escaped the keen feminine perceptions of the Strydom ladies; but Mrs. Jackson did not appear to notice any lack of cordiality. She took off her straw hat directly she entered the house, and laughed and chattered as amiably as if they had known each other intimately for years.

At midday Johannus came in from the

farm. Mrs. Jackson received him as an old and favoured friend, and addressed him as "Johnny." At this Anglicisation of their brother's name, the two sisters exchanged peculiar glances, and their manner became more frigid. Johannus himself, however, blushed with pleasure, and went and seated himself by Mrs. Jackson. He was a fine-grown, healthy-looking, and comely young Dutchman, such as are most of the men of that race in South Africa, with brownish hair, blue eyes, and a budding chestnut beard and moustache. Perhaps his ideas followed each other too slowly and distantly for a genius, but he was gifted with a great fund of common-sense, was sincere, and, if somewhat slow, sure.

Had it not been for Johannus, I am sure the afternoon would have dragged wearily for Mrs. Jackson, for the Strydom ladies appeared to have quite exhausted all their conversational powers, and could rarely give more than monosyllabic replies to her various remarks. At about three o'clock she declared she must be going.

"If I don't go now, my husband'll be back before me," she explained apologetically. "You'll walk me home, won't you, Johnny?"

Johnny at once declared that that had been his dearest hope, when the elder Miss Strydom, remarking that exercise was positively necessary for her, expressed an intention of going with them. "Come along then," said the good-natured brother, but at this intimation a slight contraction of the visitor's black eyebrows might have been observed, a spectator with an acoustic machine might possibly have detected the vibrations of a half-whispered d——n, and a little petulant motion of the foot, though immediately checked, was quite palpable.

However, any annoyance which Mrs. Jackson may have felt at the unexpected addition of a third to their party was soon dissipated. It was a glorious afternoon, with a warm, genial sun; and she laughed and frolicked in its rays like an amorous cat. While she was skipping over the bushes of heath, Cornelia Strydom noticed that which her brother had probably discovered a month or so earlier, namely, that Mrs. Jackson had very pretty feet and ankles, and a neatly-turned calf. She stopped at the door of the hut and said good-bye without asking them to come in. As Johannus shook hands with her he

felt a triangular piece of paper squeezed into the palm of his hand. At the same time he caught a look which seemed to demand secrecy, and intuitively he secured the note in such a way as to escape even the lynx eyes of his sister.

Directly he was alone, Johannus unfolded the note. It was an amorous epistle, penned in high-flown, if not extravagant, language. The writer stated that she had reasons for supposing that Johannus was not unfavourably inclined towards her. She declared that her life was unbearable and utterly wasted in her present situation, and she implored him therefore to fly with her to more congenial and more festive scenes, where, secure in each other's affection, and living but to love, existence would become like a beautiful dream. This and a good deal more to the same effect.

Johannus pulled his budding beard with a pleased but puzzled expression as he finished the perusal of this unambiguous document. He was pleased and flattered at the preference which the pretty Mrs. Jackson had shown for him, not pausing perhaps to reflect that her neighbours were so very few that she might not be acquainted with any other individual

of a suitable age for an elopement; but that fund of shrewd common-sense, with which most Dutchmen are endowed, saved him from committing himself hastily. To fly to other scenes, both congenial and festive. That sounded very inviting; but where were these scenes to be found, and how were they to be reached? He was not in possession of any income, and, indeed, never owned a shilling of his own, except when he occasionally contrived to extract one from his father. She, on the other hand, said nothing about money, and it was not probable, considering the circumstances under which she lived, that she had any. How were they to reach these much-to-be-desired scenes without money? Only by walking, apparently, and yet they must be far off. How, too, were they to obtain eatables and drinkables without that necessary, though possibly filthy, lucre? On the whole, he was inclined to think that Mrs. Jackson's scheme was, if not impracticable, at least ill-digested. There was no provision for details. No doubt he would have been exceedingly glad to respond to any amorous advances which would not entail so formidable and decisive a step as that now proposed.

Perhaps, even, he had ventured upon a few preliminary passages. But how could he leave his family, and rush off, heaven knew where, without money or the prospect of obtaining any? To do this a man must be very much in love, insanely in love, and this was not the condition of Johannus Strydom.

He decided, then, to decline as politely as possible. But here was a new difficulty. How could he inform a lady that circumstances over which he had no control prevented him taking advantage of the proffered possession of her charming person? Little versed as he was in the intricacies of a feminine mind, he saw that this would be an outrage.

In this dilemma he decided to consult his father. Young men in South Africa, especially those of Dutch extraction, are emancipated from parental control much later in life than is the case with young men in England. In fact, in most Dutch farmer-families, a young man is dependent upon his father in every way until he marries and sets up an establishment for himself, which usually means that he is put in possession of a farm stocked by his father. Therefore, although a young Englishman of twenty-three or twenty-five years of

age would never dream of asking "the Governor's" advice in a delicate matter of this kind, Johannus Strydom naturally sought him for assistance.

The same night, when the ladies of the Strydom family had retired to rest, and the head of the establishment was sitting by the chimney-corner, finishing his last pipe, Johannus boldly broached the subject. His father listened to the recital with supreme gravity and without interruption. At its close he asked a few leading questions.

"What has taken place between you and the woman?"

Johannus blushed. "Nothing, father."

"What? Nothing? And she writes you such a letter? Thunder and lightning, it is not credible. Do you mean to say you have never kissed her?"

"I—I don't remember."

"If you don't remember, you certainly have," said the old man with the decision of a Solomon. "How often?"

"Really, father, I don't know. Perhaps twice."

"Perhaps twice. Humph." Here the old man crammed the tobacco down the bowl of

his porcelain pipe with his little finger, blew furious clouds for a few moments, and then resumed :

"You will go and stay with your uncle at Zwart Fontein."

Zwart Fontein was a farm near Hopefield, in the Malmesbury district, and Johannus meekly assented.

"You will start to-morrow morning."

"Yes—and the letter?"

"You will not answer it."

"Not answer it?"

"No. You will go away."

"But——"

"But me no buts, my son. You will go to-morrow, and you will write and say nothing. I have said it."

Early next morning, almost before daybreak, Johannus departed in a Cape cart, drawn by two rough horses. His father prudently accompanied him, in order to nip in the bud any endeavours which his son might make to communicate with his neighbour's wife, and also to give certain instructions to his brother at Zwart Fontein. But in truth, Johannus had no idea of doing anything of the sort. He was not sorry to be clear of what might

have become an awkward complication, and it never occurred to him to disobey his father's injunctions.

Two days later Mrs. Jackson contrived to make her way a second time to Sea-cow Farm. She received the intelligence of Johannus's departure without exhibiting any signs of surprise, and, soon after, left to return to her own habitation. Once out on the Flats, and out of sight of the Strydom mansion, she laid aside her composure, and indulged in a little pantomime. She tore off her hat and hurled it on the ground, clenching her little fists. Then, observing that a straying ribbon on the hat was dipping into a pool of water, she hastily picked it up, wiped off the moisture, and replaced it on her head. "Coward, fool, ass," she ejaculated, "to run away. Call yourself a man?" Then she smiled disdainfully, and stopped to look at the reflection of her face in the still water of the vley. "Am I then so very ugly?" she asked, as she coquettishly pushed back her hat, and arranged her hair. The truthful fluid emphatically declared the contrary. She laughed. Then she stamped. "You have insulted me, young man. Very well—I will be even with you—Dutch

dunderhead!" Next, she studied herself in various attitudes over the vley, as a professional beauty in another clime might do before a cheval-glass. This pleasing occupation took up some little time; then suddenly she started, and saying: "Good gracious! My old fool'll be back if I ain't quick," she gathered up her skirts and ran off towards the solitary hut.

About two months after the departure of Johannus to Zwart Fontein, as old Strydom was returning from Rondebosch by the Hottentot's Holland Road, his horse snorted and stopped still. Looking round to see what was the matter, he observed a man lying on his face amongst the low clumps of heath by the roadside. He dismounted, passing his arm through the bridle, and approached to make a closer investigation. He found that the man was his misanthropic neighbour, whom he imagined to be in some kind of fit, as his fingers were tightly clenched, the eyes open with the eye-balls turned up, and the teeth close shut. He turned the man on to his back, unfastened the collar of his shirt, looked about for some water, and seeing a small vley at a little distance, went and filled his felt hat. After he had

dashed two or three handfuls of this in the face of the unconscious man the latter moved, his muscles became less rigid, and the eyes closed. Strydom poured a little water between the relaxing lips, dashed the remainder on the man's head, and a cure was effected.

Jackson groaned once or twice, then half turned on his side, and looked at the man who had perhaps snatched him from the jaws of death. His first speech was characterised by a sad want of gratitude.

"What did you touch me for?" he asked sullenly. "Why couldn't you let me be where I was?"

"Ten thousand thunders and lightnings," returned the old Dutchman indignantly. "I never met just such a man before. Think you then that I have no bowels of compassion, to leave a fellow Christian lying in the veldt?"

Jackson did not reply. He strove to rise to his feet, but was too weak to do more than gain a sitting posture.

"Tush, tush," said his preserver rebukingly. "You are not yet fit to stand. Come, mount my horse, and I will take you home."

So saying, he half raised the invalid, who shamefacedly allowed himself to be put in the

saddle. Then he put his arm round his neighbour to secure him in his position, and walked beside him. For some distance neither spoke; then, as they were nearing Jackson's house, old Strydom broke the silence.

"You were in some kind of fit, I think. Have you had such a thing before? Does your wife know, or will she be frightened?"

"I've got no wife."

The answer came so despairingly and yet so savagely, that the good old man recoiled.

"No wife," he exclaimed, astonished. "Is she then dead?"

"Worse."

He was about to inquire further when Jackson grasped his shoulder, saying—"Wait." They were now by the hut. The door stood wide open. They entered. Strydom struck a match and lighted a tallow-candle which stood on a shelf. Jackson staggered to a chair and threw himself down.

"Read that," he said, pointing to a crumpled piece of paper which lay upon the table.

The old farmer took it up, smoothed it on his knee and perused it with care. It was from Mrs. Jackson to her husband, and was short and to the point. She briefly informed him

that she had left him for "more congenial and more festive scenes," a phrase of which she was apparently enamoured, and that he need not trouble to come after her, as, even should he succeed in finding her, nothing on earth would induce her to return to the "dead-and-alive hole" in which he had placed her.

"So—so," said the old Dutchman, as he folded the note and replaced it on the table.

Jackson groaned.

"But, my good friend," continued the farmer, "grieve not. No woman who could thus write would be worth an honest man's thought."

"So I try to say—so I try to say," groaned Jackson. "Good riddance I try to call it. But I can't—yet."

"Do you know with whom she went, or where?"

"No, nothing, nothing—only that. O God!" and throwing himself on the bed, he writhed to and fro, grasping convulsively at the coverlet with his fingers, and moaning.

Old Strydom regarded him pityingly. "Come, come," said he. "Do not give way like that. You had best not stay here alone

this night. Come then with me, and I will give you supper and bed."

"Go there?" almost shouted Jackson, raising himself on the bed. "Wasn't it your cursed wife and daughters' first coming here that turned her head and made her dissatisfied?"

The old Dutchman looked astounded. "Man," he said, "your brain must be turned. You know not what you say."

"It will be soon if you don't leave me," retorted the misanthrope. "Will you go?"

Strydom stood still, watching.

"Go, go — I say," reiterated Jackson angrily. "I don't want you. Go."

Strydom moved slowly towards the door, where he stopped, and again turned to make a last offer of hospitality and assistance.

"Damnation!" shouted the bereaved husband, raising himself on his elbow. "Will you go? Ain't you satisfied? Haven't you seen enough? Go and grin somewhere else."

The old man passed out. He unhitched the horse and waited a few moments. He could hear the creaking of the old bedstead inside as the man tossed himself to and fro, and an occasional imprecation or groan. He shook

his head sorrowfully as he mounted and rode off. "The man is demented," he thought.

The Strydom ladies were not surprised at the intelligence of Mrs. Jackson's flight. It was, they said, that which they had all along expected to occur. The old man did not, however, share with them a feeling of uneasiness he had as to how far Johannus was involved in the matter. He was oppressed with a horrible dread that his son had corresponded with the fair Mrs. Jackson from Zwart Fontein, and that she had gone there to seek him. He, accordingly, invented some business which required him to go to his brother's farm, and next morning posted over there, where he was exceedingly gratified to find his son quietly engaged in his bucolic pursuits. Without mentioning what had occurred, he returned, much relieved, to Sea-cow Farm.

Next day he went over to see how his neighbour was getting on. He appeared quite restored to health, but there was a strange restlessness and wildness about him. Strydom made friendly offers of condolence and assistance. They were received ungraciously and repellingly. "P'raps you mean well, and p'raps you don't," said Jackson. "But, anyhow, I don't

want you. I can take care of myself; and as for pity, don't try it on here."

The farmer, thus repulsed, went away sadly. To his mind it was clear that the man was mad, and this notion became confirmed when it began to be rumoured that, once or twice at night, a bare-headed man, supposed to have been Jackson, had been seen running to and fro on the Flats, calling aloud a woman's name, and uttering horrible imprecations.

The young lady Strydoms had been most painstaking in their endeavours to clear up all that was mysterious in the disappearance of their neighbour, and had arrived at certain results. They had learned that Mrs. Jackson's departure dated from the departure from Cape Town, for Algoa Bay, of an itinerant circus troupe, which had, after visiting America, Australia, and New Zealand, ventured its fortunes in South Africa. She had, it appeared, been seen in company with Signor Ferdinando Altamonti, a muscular gentleman of Hibernian extraction, and who, being a descendant of the "ancient kings of Oireland," had naturally laid aside his patronymic when driven by a concatenation of untoward events to accept employment in a sphere so far below that in

which his illustrious ancestors had moved. This gentleman's business had been to perform various feats of strength with some large balls, which might have been, as they were said to be, of iron, or which might, on the other hand, have been of wood. He had a roguish eye, and a taking manner with ladies. It was not known how Mrs. Jackson had become acquainted with him. Anyhow, she was gone, and as there was now no necessity for the further expatriation of Johannus, that erring prodigal, repentant and blushing, was reclaimed from Zwart Fontein, and received once more in the bosom of his family.

The elopement of his wife did not, of course, tend to make Peter Jackson regard mankind with greater affection than he had hitherto bestowed upon them. Always eccentric and of solitary habits, he now shunned the society of his fellow-men more than ever; and at last never left the neighbourhood of his hut, except when it became necessary for him to have recourse to the small shop at Salt River for supplies of food. This was the only place he went to. Day after day he fell further away from the usages of civilisation. His clothing, ragged and dirty, was never mended or washed, and

his hut presented a picture of the acme of neglect.

This perpetual solitary brooding naturally resulted in an abnormal development of that idiosyncrasy which had in the beginning rendered solitude more agreeable to him than companionship. Week after week he dwelt with a dull sense of pain on the loss and injury which he had sustained, and, as month after month passed, his ideas gained shape and substance. He believed that he was a man suffering from an irreparable injury which he must revenge. In the curious condition of mind in which he had got he regarded his peccant wife as an angel of purity, beauty, and amiability, who had been snatched from him by the wiles of some skilled seducer. All his thoughts of anger were for the man who had thus beguiled her, and he had even reached the condition of thinking that his wife's conduct was natural, if not altogether excusable. Day after day he indulged in wild gloating ideas of what he would do when he met face to face with the man—who was really unknown to him even by report, for he had heard nothing of Signor Ferdinando Altamonti. Yet, strange to say, he made no attempt to

search for his enemy. He was possessed with a strange hallucination that he would come to him, and that the deed would be done on the spot where the injury had been inflicted. So he watched and waited, confident that fate would bring to him the man for whom he was waiting.

As he sat by the fire on this stormy evening, he went over the old ground again and again in his thoughts. "Pretty dear," he said, half-aloud, "I never ought to have brought you to this place to live. 'Dead-and-alive hole' you called it. Ha, ha! so it is. Never mind; when he's dead, and it won't be long now, we'll go and live in town, where there'll be theayters, and concerts, and what-not. Oh! it'll be a fine time when he's dead." Here his mood changed, and he groaned: "How much longer, how much longer, O Lord, for the retribution of blood?"

The rain fell heavily outside, and the distant roll of thunder amongst the mountains echoed dully through the downpour. Suddenly the dog turned uneasily and growled. A few seconds afterwards a footstep was heard outside, and then some one tried the latch of the door. At the first sound of the step Jackson

had risen with a strange look of exultation in his face. "At last, at last," he murmured. "This is the way he always comes in the dream." So saying, he reached down from the two hooks on which it hung his fowling-piece. It was loaded. He removed the cap, smote the butt smartly with his hand to drive the powder up the nipple, and replaced it. The person who had tried the latch, finding the door bolted, had commenced tapping softly. Jackson cocked his gun and moved stealthily to the door. His eyes were fixed and straining, and the corners of his lips curled back. As he crept towards the door in a crouching attitude, he looked like some beast of prey about to spring.

He stretched out his right hand and drew the bolt. The door flew open with a gust of wind and rain as he brought the gun to his shoulder, and hooked his finger round the trigger. The next moment he dropped the gun to the ground, and, rushing forward, threw his arms round the visitor. It was his wife.

"My pretty dear, my pretty darling," he said in a broken voice. "I knew you would come back," and he stroked her cheek with his open palm.

Mrs. Jackson laughed. She had not been prepared for this kind of welcome. She had expected to have been received with upbraidings, and perhaps with violence, and had accordingly prepared a variety of excuses and recriminations.

Her husband led her to the fire.

"Poor dear, how wet it is!" he said, as he felt her clothes, heavy with rain-water. She took off her bedraggled hat, and wrung the moisture out of her hair. Then she seated herself in front of the fire to dry her petticoats, her husband standing to one side of her, gazing admiringly, and every now and then leaning forward to caress her cheek.

She had changed during her absence, but not for the better. She was still pretty, but I am sorry to have to state that her face bore traces which could only be attributed to a persistent absorption of alcoholic beverages. Her voice was harsher, probably from the same cause. Her clothes were ragged, and her appearance slatternly. She looked curiously at her husband, at a loss to account for his unfeigned ecstasy at her return. Her first thought was to attribute his unexpected behaviour to the influence of Cape Smoke, or

some fluid of equal potency; but she looked round the room and failed to detect signs of its presence. Perhaps it was this train of thought that reminded her that she required some stimulant, or, perhaps, it was with the design of really finding out whether her husband had been drinking or not that she asked if he had any spirits in the house.

"Spirits, deary?" said Peter. "You know I never touch 'em, and there ain't been such a thing here for years."

Then he fell to fondling her hand, and looking with lover-like earnestness into her face. Mrs. Jackson's eyes fell before the strange, eager gaze of her husband. She withdrew her hand. "Good gracious," she thought, with a little shudder. "I do believe the old fool's cracked."

Watchful as a mother over a child that had just been restored to her, he noticed the convulsive little tremor.

"You are cold, deary," he said. "Take off your wet things, and wrap yourself in the blanket."

Mrs. Jackson laughed. "I think a drop of something would do me more good," she replied.

"I'll go and get some."

"Where'll you get it at this hour?"

"I'll go to Strydom's. That's the nearest. They'll be sure to have gin, being Dutch."

"Oh, yes! the Strydoms. They are still here, then?"

"Yes, deary. I believe so."

Her husband had taken up his hat and was moving to the door, when she stopped him.

"Has that young boy—what's his name—Johannus, come back yet?"

Jackson turned back. "Come back from what, deary?"

"Oh! didn't you know he ran away?" she inquired.

"No; I didn't know. But he is here now. I have seen him. I do not remember how long ago. Sometimes I think my memory is getting bad."

"Well, don't go there."

A new look of intelligence came into her husband's face. Mrs. Jackson continued: "Don't go to him for anything. He insulted me, and I hate him."

Jackson returned to the fire. "There, there, dear," said he, patting his wife's head.

"I know now—I know now. It'll soon be all right, and then we'll go and live in town, where there's theayters, and circuses, and such things." At this reference to circuses Mrs. Jackson looked uneasy; but her husband continued: "And to think that p'raps for a week, p'raps for a month, p'raps longer, he has been here close at hand, and me not knowing it was the man. How wonderful are Thy ways, O Lord!"

They sat side by side in front of the fire. Presently the man broke the silence.

"And it was him, was it, that——" and he whispered in his wife's ear.

Mrs. Jackson started. She had not previously understood the drift of his words. Well, it was just as well to let the "old fool," as she termed him in her thoughts, think it was Johannus, as know the truth. It would, in fact, be better. She could make out a better exculpation for herself that way; and Johannus, the coward, the dunderhead, who had insulted and outraged her, he would have the blame thrown upon his shoulders. It would be a revenge of some sort. She almost laughed at the thought. Then she drooped her eyelids softly over her black eyes, and, turning her

head away from her husband, murmured bashfully, "Yes."

A long silence followed. Mr. Jackson rose, and paced nervously up and down the room. Presently Mrs. Jackson declared she would go to sleep.

"You've got nothing here to drink, and nothing to eat — at least nothing that I can eat," she said, looking disparagingly at the goat's-milk cheese and biltonge on the shelf, "so I'll try and get a little sleep. I'm tired out."

"Yes, deary, sleep, sleep," said her husband eagerly. "To-morrow we'll settle our plans. We'll go to town, and we'll be happy, oh, so happy!"

He impressed a chaste salute upon her lips, and went and sat by the fire. His wife threw herself on the bed. After about an hour Jackson rose, moved on tip-toe to the bed, and peered over her. She was asleep. Then he noiselessly picked up his gun from the spot where he had let it fall when she first entered, went back to the fire, cautiously and silently drew the charge, and reloaded it with a fresh one: and then, once more on tip-toe, crept

to the door, opened it, and passed out. The rain had ceased. It was a cold and windy night, and pitch dark.

What remains to be told may be read in the newspapers of the period, in which full accounts of the trial were given. From the evidence of Cobus, a Hottentot in the employment of old Strydom, it appeared that shortly after daybreak he had seen Johannus coming out of the house, and going towards the yard at the back. A few seconds afterwards he had heard the report of a gun, and running to see what it was, saw his young master lying on his back, covered with blood, close to the door of the cow-shed. Seeing a man just inside the cow-shed engaged in loading a gun, he had shouted out, and had then rushed into the house and alarmed the family. The man he had seen loading the gun was the prisoner in the dock. He knew him by sight. He lived about three miles from Sea-cow Farm; his name was Jackson. The witness further deposed that he had been sent off post-haste to fetch a doctor and the police, and that on returning with the former, he had been told that Johannus was dead.

Cornelius Strydom said that, having been aroused by Cobus, who told him that his son was murdered, he had hastened down to the yard, where he had found it was but too true. The old man's voice trembled, and he nearly broke down more than once during his evidence. He had seen the prisoner in the cow-shed, with a gun, and had called his servants to secure him. The prisoner had not attempted to escape, and had offered no resistance. He had upbraided the prisoner for his cruel deed, and the latter had asserted that he was justified in doing it, since Johannus had stolen away his wife. This was not true. The prisoner's wife had invited his son to elope with her, but his son had shown him the letter, and he had sent him out of harm's way into the country. After that he had never seen her again.

The doctor gave evidence, in highly scientific phraseology, that death was by a gun-shot wound, that it must have been instantaneous, as the chest was blown to pieces by a charge of hea duck-shot, which must have been fired at distance of a few feet only. Other witnes gave corroborative evidence. The prison

in his defence pleaded justification, and persisted in maintaining that his wife had eloped with the murdered man. The prisoner's wife was not called, nor could her whereabouts be ascertained. The trial lasted a week, and the event created quite a sensation in South African circles.

Peter Jackson suffered the last penalty of the law. That, however, was not much satisfaction to old Strydom and his wife. They could not get back again their dead son, the pride of their house, the hope and stay of their declining years. They would have much preferred to have seen his wife hanged, and not Jackson, whom they had long considered mad; but the lady carefully kept out of sight during these protracted and unpleasant proceedings. But their chief interest in life was gone. They were childless, for do not daughters count as nothing in the eyes of all conservative Dutchmen?

Every story, I am told, should have a moral. I have tried to ascertain what the moral of this authentic story may be, and am divided between the choice of two. One is, that one should never receive ungraciously

advances made by a pretty woman; and the other is, that one should always pretend not to see a man lying, apparently sick, by a roadside. Neither one of them, I am afraid, is a very good moral; but still they are the best at hand.

XI.

WAYSIDE SKETCHES.

FEW things in South Africa more impress a new-comer, especially one who has been accustomed to the enclosed country of England, with its regularly defined fields, plantations, and commons, than the unbroken vastness of the tracts through which one passes. From the waggon or cart in which you make your journey, and which will be as it were your home for so many days or weeks, the eye roams over wastes of undulating plains, with no tree, hedge, wall, or house to break the outline, and which trend away into the dim distance to be perhaps faintly bounded by flat-topped ranges of mountains. In the immensity of the prospect, the stillness and the absence of life, there is something oppressive.

This is especially the case on the road

from Cape Town to the Transvaal, *viâ* Griqualand West. After leaving Ceres you enter upon a succession of Karroos, or treeless and waterless plateaus, each circumscribed by its distant hills. The road traverses these wastes like a mere line drawn across a sheet of cartridge-paper, and, to all intents and purposes, the country to either side of it is a desert. At rare intervals—sometimes ten, sometimes twenty miles, and sometimes at even greater distances apart—occur houses, the residences of Boers. These houses are generally built near a dry watercourse, raised in the maps to the dignity of a river, and which may occasionally have a little water in it. But such occasions are always the exception. The rain-bearing clouds from the sea are generally stopped by the mountain ranges nearer to the coast on the south and east, and in some portions of these Karroos, six or seven years have been known to pass without a shower falling.

At still greater intervals along the road are towns. You drive fifty, sixty, or a hund miles over a bare plain, and suddenly upon a town, after leaving which another l expanse of uninhabited country is traver

You ask yourself what is the *raison d'etre* of these towns. None of them seem to have any special industry. Why were they built? The soil is not fertile, there is no attractive scenery, and no timber, neither is there mineral wealth. There is only water, which after all may perhaps account for the mystery.

These towns generally consist of red and white houses, built of brick or plastered mud. The few streets cross each other at right angles, and are perhaps graced by a few willows. At a little distance will be the Native Location, where the black and coloured people live. Built in the middle of a treeless veldt, sometimes without a bush worthy of the name of tree within a hundred miles, to arrive at one of these towns is like calling in at a small island in mid-ocean for a few hours. You stretch your legs on shore as it were for a little time, then you embark again and go off, and the cluster of houses gradually fades away in the distance. Perhaps two days later you will touch at another island—I mean town. They all present a strong family likeness, and are all surrounded by the same barren wastes.

As you go northwards—say after leaving Victoria West—game begins to appear on the plain. It must not, however, be supposed that in the more southerly districts there is an entire absence of game. Quite the contrary. Within a few miles of such centres of civilisation as Cape Town and Port Elizabeth small gazelles, genets, hares, jerboas, and deer abound; but, as a rule, they lurk in the kloofs and thickets until nightfall, when they issue forth. Here, however, there is no concealment. Herds of springbok are seen daily from the waggon. Then the sportsman, for there is sure to be a sportsman about, unearths a rifle from his baggage. The waggon stops. The sportsman takes a long and careful aim, and fires. You see the bullet knocking up the dust about four hundred yards off. The buck are really about six hundred yards distant, but the purity of the air in these upland plateaus causes objects to appear much nearer than they really are, and it is difficult to judge distance on a bare plain.

At the sound of the rifle the springbok bound seven or eight feet in the air, clearing at each spring some fifteen feet of ground. In this manner they make off for a few

hundred yards, each appearing for an instant suspended in the air, and then coming down again with all four feet together. Then they change their mode of progression to a trot, arching their necks, and lowering their noses to the ground. Then they stop, and turn to have another look. In the meantime the waggon has gone on. At a distance of perhaps half-a-mile the buck trot along, keeping up with it. Then they commence to circle ahead, approaching the road. As the road is reached each buck clears it with a single bound, so suspicious are they of beaten tracks. Ten, twenty, or thirty of them leap it together, and then, trotting away over the veldt, they once more stop and regard the waggon inquisitively from the other side.

Fifteen or sixteen years ago, perhaps only a couple of hundred miles further on, one might chance to see a trek-bokken, or migration of springbok. All night at the outspan would be heard the grunting of bucks, and at daybreak the plain would be seen covered with a living mass of springbok, marching steadily along. For hour after hour they would continue pouring through an opening in the hills like a flood, and disappearing over a distant ridge.

This is one of the most wonderful sights it is given to man to behold. There is something majestic in these countless herds of wild animals all moving in one direction without a pause. Then many men feel stirring within them instincts which have been doubtless inherited from our remote savage ancestry, and which have been disguised by civilisation but not rooted out. They rush to gun and horse. They charge upon the flanks of the living mass, loading and firing again and again, until with the thirst of blood satiated, and the plain covered with the bodies of twenty, thirty, or forty dead and dying springbok, they return to the outspan exulting. One, or at all events two victims, would have been sufficient for food; the rest will lie there and rot, or be devoured by jackals and vultures. Such trek-bokken are now, I am told, only to be seen far north in the Transvaal or Bechuanaland. The only wonder is that, considering the number annually slaughtered, for sport, for food, and for the gratification of the instinct of destruction, there are any left to migrate even so near as that; for since the opening of the Diamond Fields, thousands

upon thousands of springbok, blesbok, and black gnus have been killed, and waggon-loads of springbok venison, brought in by the Boers for sale, might frequently be seen at Du Toit's Pan and the New Rush.

At night-time you will outspan in the veldt, near some vley, or close to a Boer's house, with a dam appertaining thereto. If the latter, it does not follow that you will sleep under a roof, as Boers do not, as a rule, have spare beds. The whole family usually occupy one bedroom, and sleep in their clothes. For the casual visitor, who dislikes sleeping out of doors, there is the floor of plastered dung of the other apartment, or perchance, if it be sufficiently long, a table; and to most men a kaross or blanket on the ground out in the open air is preferable to these. There is a strange sense of novelty in sleeping out of doors in an unknown country for the first time. There is a sense of insecurity produced by the absence of the four enclosing walls to which you have been accustomed, and by the knowledge that your present retiring-room is a plain several miles in extent. All this, however, wears off in a day

or two at the most, and sleeping on the ground in your clothes and boots becomes soon to be regarded as the normal condition of things.

At night, at the outspan, are novel sounds and sights. As darkness sets in the cranes and herons from round about begin to collect on the vley or dam by which you have outspanned, and form long rows in the middle of the shallow water, where they may remain all night secure from the attacks of jackals and wild cats. At intervals during the night you hear them calling to one another, and sometimes all their voices are raised in a general hubbub. Either something has alarmed them, or the birds that have been on the watch are suggesting that it is time for others to relieve them of that duty. In the bright moonlight you will see them all chattering together volubly, and then, the matter in hand having been settled, all but two or three tuck their long necks under their wings and go to sleep again.

At a little distance will be the camp fire of your "boys"—Korannas, Basutos, Griquas, or Bechuanas. They sit close round it, talk volubly, with their teeth and eyes glisten in the firelight. They are accomplished liars and enliven the evening by startling narrat

of their own achievements. Sometimes they break out in song, which usually consists of a solo, two or three bars in length, yelled at the top of the voice, and a chorus, all this in a minor key. The air is not unpleasing if somewhat monotonous. They will perhaps go on for hours singing the same ditty, and the longer they continue the better you like it. Instead of feeling exasperated at the interminable repetition, you find it growing upon you. Everything seems to move to the strongly-marked rhythm. Unconsciously you beat time with your fingers and hum the air under your breath, and, after about half-an-hour of it, you will be seized with an insane desire to sing or dance yourself.

These songs are generally about war or cattle-lifting. I remember one in particular about cattle, of which the chorus was "E—e—e—yu—yu—yu. E—e—e—yu—yu—yu." The p[illegible] were, I believe, Zulus, and accompanied with vigorous men were squatting on their [illegible] the fire, with their elbows [illegible]s, and their forearms, [illegible]eld straight to the [illegible] they drove

their arms out to their full length, and at each "yu," they brought back their elbows with a thud to their sides. So much energy did they expend in this exercise that they were all streaming with perspiration, and in the firelight looked as if they had been polished. This song went on without change for an hour at least.

After crossing the Orange River at Hope-town the scenery changes slightly. At Scholtz Fontein, instead of the stunted rhinoster bush, the rolling plains are covered with grass, not with turf like an English meadow, but with grass growing in tufts and patches, coarse-looking and from one to two feet high. Clumps of camel-thorn acacias, with their broad-spreading crowns, give the plain a park-like appearance; and hanging down from their branches are the nests of the sociable weaver-birds, built so closely together that the whole resembles one large nest covered with a single conical roof perhaps three feet in diameter. Ant-hills, about three feet high and nine feet in circumference, formed of a reddish-brown earth, stud the plain. Those deserted—and an ant-hill is always deserted when its queen dies—can easily be distinguished

from those still inhabited by their rough and perforated exterior. Perchance, if you search, a wild-bee's nest, with its stock of sweet-scented honey, may be found in one of them.

On the rocky hills and knolls, baboons, which probably you will not have seen since you traversed the three mountain barriers at Baine's Kloof, Mitchell's Pass, and Hottentot's Kloof, begin to appear. On the ridges their sentinels, generally old males distinguished by the long thick hair which falls over their shoulders, will be posted to keep a sharp look-out, while the remainder of the troop are intent upon plundering some mealie field or garden below. If you attempt to approach, one of the sentinels will utter a warning cry, and in a few minutes you will see the whole community scrambling up the rocks, mothers with their babies clinging round them, half-grown boys and girls, and adult males, all with their pouches and paws filled with their spoil. On the march they move with almost military precautions. The young males form the advanced guard, and are scattered over the ground far ahead as scouts; next comes the main body, composed of the females and young ones, while the old men bring up the rear.

The Dutch farmers complain bitterly of their depredations. Whenever a garden or field is left unguarded, they descend upon it and plunder. They are said, too, to be very destructive with sheep, seizing the lambs, and tearing open their stomachs with their teeth, so as to drink the milk they contain. In this way they will kill several in a very short time, leaving one writhing disembowelled on the ground, and passing on to another. If the baboons have been lately more than usually destructive you will probably be invited to stay and shoot some of them. They are sufficiently fierce, especially when wounded, and even when unmolested have been known to attack and kill men ; but with modern fire-arms they are shot easily enough. From a distance of three or four hundred yards a rifle bullet may be dropped into the midst of a group. They do not at once scatter to cover. They utter loud cries, surrounding the one that has been wounded or killed, and appear to be inquiring whence the missile has come. They search the surrounding country with their eyes until they discover the aggressor, and then, in a moment, not one is to be seen. The pitiful, half-human gestures of the wounded, especially of the

females, and the pathetic endeavours of the young to arouse their dead mothers, makes the shooting of baboons but sorry sport to any one who does not possess what is called "the true sportsmanlike instinct;" but the Boers have the destruction of their flocks or crops to avenge, and so are callous.

Probably, almost certainly, you will one day stop at a farm devoted to ostrich-farming, a profitable business enough, but attended with risks peculiar to itself. Birds just hatched are worth £5, a half-grown one from £20 to £50, and as much as £120 is sometimes paid for brooding hens. Should a wild ostrich happen to come along that way, he will carry off with him all the semi-domesticated birds, and the ostrich-farmer is ruined. The birds are plucked before they are a year old. The operation is attended with some difficulty and danger, as the kick of an ostrich will easily fracture a limb. When several have to be plucked they are penned up closely together, so that there is no room for them to spread their wings or make that dart forward which appears to be the necessary preliminary of a kick, and the men then go among them.

At some farms the half-grown ostriches

run about round the house like domestic poultry. I remember this was the case at a farm, Du Plooi's, I think, near the Riet River. We outspanned there one morning about ten, and arranged with the people to have some breakfast. Among my fellow-travellers was a young Englishman, who, ever since we had started from Cape Town, had been making conscientious endeavours to empty his flask of "Cango" brandy between every two halting-places. It was an internecine struggle, in which it seemed probable that the flask would be the victor, for, for the past day or two, the champion had been observed making wild clutches at imaginary flies in the air in front of his nose. He looked suspiciously at the ostriches at this place, half-doubting perhaps whether they were not mere creations of his brain, and they certainly did look ugly and ungainly creatures, for they had been plucked recently.

We went in to breakfast, which consisted of the invariable tough mutton-chop, fried in sheep-tail fat. I had a seat opposite the door, and my *vis-à-vis* was the young Englishman. We had only been seated a few minutes when I observed an ostrich

saunter in at the door. It came up behind the young man, peered quietly over his shoulder for an instant, and then, darting its head forward, snatched a mutton-chop out of his plate. I shall never forget the look of horror which came into his face, as this sudden apparition of a long, raw-looking, and snake-like neck, terminated in a pointed head with a very vicious eye, appeared over his shoulder. He uttered a loud shriek, dropped his knife and fork, and sprang to his feet. Everybody laughed as the ostrich retreated through the door, and our bacchanalian friend sat down again, but his appetite was gone, and he was trembling all over. Just before the waggon started, I was strolling round near the house, when I saw him, at the foot of a kopje, hurling stones violently at some object on the ground. Thinking he might be going to be ill, or that he was engaged in a frantic encounter with an imaginary snake, I approached softly, and saw that he was reducing his flask to the condition of powdered glass. When he considered the fragments were sufficiently small, he crushed them under his heel, and returned to the waggon. Henceforward he drank no more

"Cango:" his fright had produced good results. What a subject this would be for a temperance tract! It might be headed, "On the Verge of D. T., or Saved by an Ostrich," with a full-length portrait of the heaven-sent ostrich on the cover.

The inhabitants of these up-country farm-houses are a strange people. The Boer is neither the pious and patriotic individual of unobtrusive habits that he is asserted to be by his zealous supporters in Great Britain, nor is he the cruel and bloodthirsty destroyer of native women and children that he is depicted by his detractors. He is simply an individual, who, through force of circumstances, namely, his separation from civilising influences, and his isolated life, has fallen away in some respects from civilisation. He is behind the times, that is all. He hates change and progress, and not only is satisfied to live as did his father, but firmly intends that his son shall continue to do so also. What is good enough for him, and was good enough for his father, must and shall be good enough for his son. The Boer's hatred of innovations is intense. Those men who threw up their farms in the Transvaal, and, in 1875,

migrated with their families to Damaraland, where the majority died, and the survivors, in the utmost destitution, had to be assisted by the British Government with food and clothing, sent by steamer to Walvisch Bay, expatriated themselves simply because President Burgers supported the scheme for the construction of a railway from Delagoa Bay to the Transvaal, and they did not want to be brought into contact with any new-fangled notions.

As are the men, so are the women. The latter can hardly be described as good-looking as a class, and their appearance is of that description which we should term "dowdy." I have, however, seen pretty Boer girls — pretty, that is, in a Dutch style of view. One, I remember, I saw when I was travelling up to the Diamond Fields in the Transport Waggon with the young Englishman whose adventure I have just narrated. Amongst the passengers was a young Adonis from the suburbs of London, who made most praiseworthy attempts to "touch up" his personal appearance whenever we stopped at a farm-house or a town, and who even ran the risk of being considered haughty by continuing to wear a collar and

necktie all through the journey, but who had looked in vain all along the road for a young damsel of attractions worthy of his high approval.

It was principally through this young man that one day the conversation turned upon the personal charms of the wives and daughters of the Boers whom we had met in our upward journey. I regret to say that as a rule the remarks were of a disparaging nature, made all the more unrestrainedly because there did not happen to be any Dutchmen included in the community of the waggon. The ankles of the fair creatures with whom we had made a passing acquaintance were termed bulbous, their faces heavy and expressionless, and their feet elephantine and destructive of insect life. Their figures were compared with the outlines presented by well-filled coal-sacks, and their costume characterised as immodestly scanty. If the truth must be told there are many things about the up-country Boer ladies which, to the eye of one accustomed to the gorgeously-apparelled dames of European cities, appear at least odd. The charm of a well-turned, but rather plump ankle, exposed, perchance

by the frolics of the wanton summer breeze in the voluminous cotton skirt, is well-nigh nullified by the coating of red dust or mud which covers its otherwise unclothed beauty. No foot, besides, could look well when thrust, unstockinged, into a down-trodden and slip-shod shoe; while no figure could appear to advantage when clothed alone in a loose cotton gown, merely drawn in at the waist. But then allowance must be made for the necessities of the situation. Separated forty, fifty, or one hundred miles from "dry-goods" stores, the paraphernalia of female finery could only with difficulty be obtained, even if they were suitable for the surroundings and occupations of the wearers, and the extreme scarcity of water at most seasons of the year renders ablution an incident in one's life. Our suburban Adonis, however, absolutely declined to take into consideration any of these extenuating circumstances, and loudly bewailed the want of comeliness and refinement in those few ladies he had met during the journey, and his own exile from more favoured lands.

"We shall stop at Riet Fontein to-night," said the guard, "and there you'll see a regular beauty."

"Humph," said Adonis disparagingly.

"A really pretty gal," continued the guard soliloquisingly.

"Bosh."

"And much superior to the or'nary run of gals."

"Skittles."

"With such eyes—sky-blue—and teeth like a Kaffir."

"Humbug."

The guard winked comprehensively at the surrounding earth and sky, and smiled sweetly to himself. Then he continued:

"Been known to refuse all the best offers round about. Said them chaps wasn't refined enough for her. Reserving herself for an Englishman, p'raps." Then he appealed to a passenger: "You know Lena Kruger, don't you, Grainger?"

The man thus called upon to substantiate the unknown damsel's claims to high-class beauty, roused himself wearily on the hard seat, and held forth. From the fragmentary sentences interspersed amongst the torrent of expletives which formed the principal portion of his speech, we gathered that the young lady was indeed a miracle of loveliness, a desert

flower; but his description was rendered singularly indefinite by his complicated metaphors.

Shortly before dusk we arrived at Riet Fontein, an unpretentious house of the usual type, consisting of two rooms. The span of mules was so knocked up by the long, hot, and dusty journey of the day, that it was evident they would require more than the usual two or three hours of rest, and the guard, after inspecting the animals, declared that we should not start till next morning. Having been sitting with our legs cramped up since three in the morning of that day, this announcement was received with contentment, and we revelled in the prospect of being able to stretch our legs for nine or ten hours.

As we strolled towards the door of the house, a young lady appeared on the threshold, and stared at us. She was unquestionably pretty—in a bucolic way. Fine fresh complexion, bright blue eyes, straight nose, red lips, and brown hair. A thought too short and plump, perhaps, but it does not do to be hypercritical. One must be thankful for the good the gods provide us, and not grumble. In the matter of costume she was not superior

to her fellow countrywomen. The usual solitary print garment fluttered in the wind, and her naked feet were thrust into shapeless veldt-schoens.

"That's Lena," said the guard to Adonis.

The latter cocked his hat a little on one side, twirled an incipient moustache, and ogled the damsel. He was not at all a bad young fellow, only he was at the time labouring under the impression that no woman could resist his great personal attractions. It is a form of disease to which a large proportion of young men are liable, and which they have to get over, like the measles and other infantile ailments.

"I'll introduce you, if you like," continued the guard.

There was really no necessity for this ceremony, we had done very well without it hitherto; but Adonis acquiesced. The guard shook hands with Lena, said something to her in Dutch, at which she laughed, and then indicated the swain by a gesture. The latter gracefully removed his hat, and the young lady extended a plump and sun-burned hand. She addressed some incomprehensible remark to him in Dutch and again smiled,

while he responded in, to her, equally incomprehensible English. It was difficult to carry on a conversation under such circumstances; but the young lady evidently wanted to be affable, and there was an absence of mannerism and conventionality about her which doubtless made Adonis regret that he had neglected the study of modern languages.

When she went to look after the household affairs, notably the preparation of a meal for us, Adonis was quite enthusiastic about her. She was, he said, the only pretty girl he had seen in South Africa. He inquired, too, more than once, what was the exact distance of Riet Fontein from Bult Fontein, his intended place of residence, and it appeared as if he were inwardly considering the practicability of riding or driving over from there occasionally, perhaps when he had improved his knowledge of the Dutch language. The secret of the young lady's amiability was revealed to me by Grainger. The guard, he said, had told Lena that Adonis was a young man of wealth and influence, who had come to South Africa to seek a wife, and that he was travelling this way on purpose to see her, having heard of her charms by report. There was nothing uncon-

ventional to Boer ideas in this mode of selecting a partner for life, and the young lady no doubt felt flattered. Of course, too, it was quite natural for a man to come to South Africa on such an errand, for the young women of England must indeed be poor creatures. Were they not cooped up in towns, where the population was numbered by tens of thousands; were they not puny, sickly, and fragile, unable to bear the least fatigue, and altogether unfitted for the great end of matrimony—maternity?

Perhaps, under more favourable circumstances, this budding love-affair might, when thus artfully stimulated, have germinated in the usual way. During the evening Adonis endeavoured by expressive glances to make up for his unfortunate inability to converse with her; but he had not much time for practising this art. About half-past eight the Boer family retired to rest in the sleeping apartment, and of the passengers some slept in the waggon, some under it, and some on the floor of the room in which we had supped.

Next morning, soon after daybreak, we were ready to start. The Boer family was already up, and Adonis sauntered into the

house to bid farewell to Miss Lena, and perhaps to make promises in pantomime of a speedy return. He did not see her inside, and was turning to come out of the door, when he ran against the guard, who was just entering.

"Just the chap I wanted to see," said the latter. "Lena's round at the back of the house, waiting to say good-bye to you. She'll expect you to kiss her—it's the custom, you know, in these parts."

Adonis moved off jauntily to perform this great physical feat, when the guard, suppressing a wild chuckle, seized me by the arm, and dragged me round to the back of the house, by the side opposite to that which Adonis had taken. We all three arrived behind about the same moment, and the first thing we beheld was a Batlapin woman holding a struggling sheep by the legs to prevent it breaking loose, while Lena, the pretty Lena Kruger, was cutting its throat with a butcher's knife. She looked up at Adonis, and smilingly said good-morning to him. But it was too much for him. He turned round sharply on his heel, his face the picture of unutterable disgust, and, without paying the least attention

to the loud guffaws of the guard, climbed into the waggon and sat there stolidly till we started. He had had quite enough of Boer young ladies for the present.

No doubt Lena must have been utterly at a loss to account for the sudden alteration of manner in a young man who had, only a few hours before, regarded her so remarkably kindly. But I have no doubt she got over it. The Boers are not romantic, and I do not fancy she pined much. At all events not too much, for when I returned that way some few months later I heard she had married th jocular guard.

XII.

LOST.

"DID my missus ever tell you how she and Liza there got lost when we were trekking up from East London last year?" asked my genial host, Tom Carey.

The scene was Klipdrift, on the Vaal River, the time was the year of grace 1872, and Tom Carey and I were sitting at the open doorway of his swish and stone tenement. Inside we could hear the voice of Tom's wife crooning a lullaby to a new arrival, a little pink-and-white baby boy some two or three months old; while running about near us, now climbing on to her father's knee, and now returning to the ever inexhaustible amusement of making sand-pies, was the Liza in question, a little, blue-eyed, fair-haired girl of some five summers.

In 1872, Klipdrift was the most civilised

camp in the then recently-acquired Waterboer's Territory, and had, at the close of 1871, been selected by the Cape Government as the metropolis of the new annexation. There were at least twenty-four houses, some of brick, some of mud and stones, and some of stones alone. These formed an irregular street along the low cliff which overhung the Vaal, and on the kopje above them was the chaos of mounds and holes, piles of boulders and broken hills of stones which marked the spot where hundreds of claims had been opened in the palmy days of Klipdrift, before the dry diggings out away on the dusty veldt at De Beer's and Du Toit's Pan had been heard of. Here and there, down towards the drift stood a ragged tent, a hut of loose stones, or a lean-to shanty made of boards and branches, where one or two impoverished diggers, the owners of the cradles which yet remained on the river brink, still lingered, the remnant of the five thousand men whose tents had, a few months back, whitened the earth, and whose brawny arms had sunk the innumerable pits, and raised the mounds of stones and earth. On the Pniel side of the river the hill was scored and pitted in a

thousand directions, while near the stream itself the graceful South African willows, fortunately preserved by a very strict clause of digger law, bowed their feathery arms over the sparkling water. It was about sunset; long purple shadows fell from the mounds of red stone and earth, the sky glowed crimson and saffron, and the metal roofs of the houses in Pniel glistened above the trees in the golden glow of evening.

I said that I had never heard of the occurrence in question, and at the same time expressed my great anxiety to be at once made acquainted with every detail.

"We had been about a year out from home," said Tom, "and were living, as you know, at East London, when the great rush to the Fields took place. It was about December, '70, that dry digging was first talked about, and about the beginning of the following year the rush took place. I had not done so well as I had expected at East London. I was neither better nor worse off than when we had left England, and I had expected to be much better off. Anyhow I was not altogether satisfied, and, like everybody else, I thought I had only to go to the

Fields to make a fortune. I talked it over with Mary. She was dead against it at first, but when she saw my mind was bent on going, she gave way; only she insisted on going with me, for I had intended leaving her behind, and I think on the whole she was right. I bought a waggon and a span of oxen, laid in a supply of grub for the journey, and of picks, spades, etc., for the diggings, and one morning off we started. We went on from King William's Town to Fort Beaufort, from that to Bedford, and from Bedford to Cradock without accident. We stayed at Cradock two days.

"The first night out from Cradock we outspanned near Zoutpan's Drift, on the Great Fish River, just under the range of mountains called Bushman's Berg. Next morning when I turned out of the waggon a little before daybreak, not one of my oxen could I see. My boys—I had three of them, one Tottie and two Kaffirs—knew nothing about them; so I swore at them and sent them to hunt them up, one of them down the river and one of them up, as I thought the cattle would be likely to keep near the water; while I started the third up the Burghers Spruit, which runs into the Fish River just there. That done,

we had nothing to do but to have breakfast and then sit down and wait.

"The sun was pretty high overhead, it must have been quite noon, and we had seen nothing of the boys, when a Boer coming down the road, and who stopped and spoke to us, told me he had seen some stray oxen near Rheboks Fontein, about seven miles up the road. Rheboks Fontein stands about four miles away from the river, so the boy who had gone up stream would not see the oxen. There was nothing to be done except for me to go after them myself, and I didn't like to leave Mary alone with the little one by the waggon; but she said she wouldn't be afraid if I'd promise to come before dark, and as I knew I could easily manage that, I suffered myself to be persuaded and went off. For some way up the road I could see her sitting inside the waggon tilt, waving her handkerchief to me, and then a low hill hid her from sight.

"I reached Rheboks Fontein in about two hours, and found the oxen there. It was then about three o'clock, and as I knew I should not be able to drive back the span by myself in time to reach the waggon before

dark, I asked the Boer to let me put them into his kraal for the night, so that I could send for them in the morning. He made no difficulty about this, but it took some time to get the cattle into the kraal, and by the time the last was in it was about four o'clock. It would be getting dark about six, so I had just time to get back and keep my promise.

"The evening was beginning to close in when I got in sight of the waggon. I could see the three boys squatting round a fire they had lighted, but no sign of my wife or child. However, I did not feel uneasy, as I thought they were inside the waggon, and, when I had come up, I went up softly and raised the flap of the tilt, to give them a surprise as I thought. They weren't there. I felt quite sick with fright for a moment. Then I thought they were perhaps hiding near to surprise me, and I looked all round, but they weren't to be seen anywhere. I asked the boys where they were, and they looked at me with their mouths open. Almost beside myself with fright and worry, I asked them if they had seen them when they returned to the waggon. One of the Kaffirs had been back about two hours, and the others about one hour. The first

said that there had been nobody with the waggon when he came back, and that he had sat down to wait, thinking I had strolled off somewhere with my wife and child. The other two said the same.

"I believe I went off my head for a bit. I know I ran down to the river, and along the bank shouting 'Mary' till I was nearly speechless, until Kleinboy, my Tottie, who was a sensible fellow in his way, said it would soon be quite dark, that there was no moon, and that if the missus was lost we ought to be looking for her. That brought me to my senses, and all four of us held a consultation. We decided that they could not have crossed the river, therefore it would be useless to search on the other side; and, finally, it was agreed that Kleinboy should go back towards Roodebank, one of the Kaffirs onward to look between the road and the river, while the remaining Kaffir and myself should go to the east of our outspan and search in the kloofs and kopjes of the Bushman's Berg.

"The boy I took with me was the one who had said he had returned to the waggon first, and I did so because the horrible idea had suddenly presented itself to me that

perhaps he had murdered them. Of course the idea was absurd. The man could have had no motive for such a deed, but in my distracted condition reason had little to do with my thoughts. In fact the boy had a great regard for me. You know all these people have at least two names—*igama*, or name given at the birth, and the *isibonga*, or name assumed afterwards, generally in commemoration of some event or deed. Some Kaffirs have several *isibongas*. A man is always addressed by his *isibonga*, and he only allows his *igama* to be known to his most intimate friends, for he believes that the knowledge of his birth name would enable wizards or witches to do him harm. Well, when this boy first came to me, I asked him his *igama*, and he wouldn't tell me; but I learned it after a time by overhearing him talking with a man of his own tribe. It was *U'mpisi*, "The Hyena," and I startled him tremendously by calling him by it when I next wanted him. He could never make out how I learned it, and regarded my knowledge of it as a proof of my wonderful power. From that moment I could depend upon him thoroughly. It was therefore the height of

folly for me to suspect him of harming my wife; but, as I said before, I couldn't get the idea out of my head.

"It soon became pitch dark, and we stumbled along over stones and rhinoster bushes towards the Berg, the spurs of which stretch down almost to the road. Every hundred yards or so we would stop and holloa, but not a sound did we hear in reply."

A few minutes before Tom had reached this point in his recital, Mrs. Carey, who had succeeded in putting the baby to sleep, had come out, and had seated herself on a low stool by her husband's side, whence, with a hand softly caressing his knee, she had been listening to him. She was not a beauty, but she was a pretty woman, and, what is of far more importance to a husband, a good wife.

"I think, my dear, you had better take up the thread of the narrative now," said Tom. "By so doing we shall be following the example of the most popular novelists of the day, and I shall also be able to light a pipe."

I added my entreaties, and Mrs. Carey began:

"When Tom went away after the oxen, I watched him along the road as far as I could see him, and when he went out of sight I felt for the first time a little frightened. Everything was so still. There were some tall mountains over to my left that seemed so grand and silent, their height and vastness seemed to weigh on me, while on the other sides were bleak and desolate plains bounded by bare, rocky hills. The stillness and want of life made me feel as if I must cry out, if only to break the awful silence; and at last I had to get inside the waggon with Liza, and let down the flap of the tilt to shut it all out. I had some needlework to do and stitched away, while Liza played with an old rag doll on the floor of the waggon.

"Then occurred something which I can never account for. Whether it was the heat, or the stillness, or what it was, I, who am always so wide awake in the daytime, must have fallen asleep. Such a thing never happened to me before since I came to the Cape. How long I slept, I don't know, but when I woke I didn't see Liza. I called her, scolding her for getting out of the waggon,

and when she didn't answer at once I jumped out to look for her.

"That moment I can never forget. There was no Liza to be seen. How can I find words to say what I felt? My darling was lost. I felt sure of that, for I could see a good long way in every direction, and she was not to be seen. What was I to say to my husband when he came back and asked for our child? How could I tell him that I had neglected my trust and gone to sleep, and allowed her to stray away? I began to cry, of course; but that did no good, so I dried my eyes and tried to think. Then I saw the yellow flowers on the bushes down by the river, and thinking she might have seen them and have gone down to pick some, I ran there to look. Among the bushes I found her little hood, which had been knocked off by a branch, I suppose, and which, child-like, she had forgotten to pick up. At first I was seized with a horrible fear that she had fallen into the water and been drowned, but I saw that it was so shallow that that was impossible. Near the hood I found some pieces of pink heath, which the poor little

dear had been picking. I had great hopes of finding her then, and I called her as loud as I could, but no answer came. I went up the river side for a long way, but there was no sign, so I came back again and went down.

"Some way down below where our waggon was, I came to a dry watercourse which ran into the river. The bottom of it was covered with sand and pebbles, and the high banks had flowering shrubs on them. I thought it was the sort of place the child would be tempted to wander up, and I turned up it. I soon knew I was right, for I found some more of the pink heather bells dropped on the sand. I walked on faster than ever now. The sun seemed to be going down. I didn't know how long I had been searching, for I did not know what the time was when I started out, but it seemed as if I had been searching for hours. Still I went on and on. I passed several other watercourses which opened into the one in which I was, and of these I was afraid to think, for perhaps she had turned up one.

"At last the ravine, for it had grown to be a ravine by this time, with sloping heights

on each side, divided into two branches. I was in despair—I sat down and sobbed aloud. Which branch was I to take? Then I blamed myself for wasting time, and jumped up and hastened up the one to the left. The day was closing in. I felt I must find my little one before it was dark. How could I leave her in the desolate wilderness alone all night? I stumbled on over the rocks which now lay thickly in the bed of the ravine, and where thorny bushes seemed to spring up out of the growing darkness. At last, oh! joy, I saw a little shoe lying on a flat stone. I knew then that she could not be far off, and I called her. There was no answer, but I went on, looking about very carefully, and presently my heart rejoiced to see my little one lying fast asleep under a thick bush. Her little head was pillowed on her arm, a half-dried tear still glistened on her cheek—she had cried herself to sleep, poor dear—and a crumpled bunch of heath lay beside her.

"I needn't tell you," said Mrs. Carey in her soft voice, "that I snatched her up and covered her with kisses. Her poor little foot was cut, she was tired out and hungry; but I, alas, had nothing to give her. I soothed her

in my arms, and then thought of going back again. But it was now pitch dark. I could not move without striking against a rock, or running into a thorned bush. Now that the excitement was over, and that I had found my lost one, my strength seemed gone, my knees gave way under me, and I sank to the ground.

"Then, for the first time, I felt frightened about myself, and thought of my husband, and the state of mind he would be in on returning to the waggon and finding us both missing. I thought of the wild beasts, of leopards, and hyenas, and jackals, and wondered what my husband would do, if he came up the ravine in the morning looking for us, and found our half-eaten bodies. My mind ran on in a strange way. He would be beside himself with grief, I knew, for he loved us both. But, then, nothing could bring us back again to life. He would perhaps marry again, and I hoped his second wife would think as much of him as I had.

"While I was thinking all this, a large bird or bat swooped close past us in the darkness, nearly brushing my hair with its wings. I felt sick with terror. I expected every moment

that it would swoop back again and peck at us, perhaps tear our eyes out. Liza was fast asleep in my arms, and I crept close up to the wall of the ravine, and crouched under a thick bush which seemed to protect me. Hours seemed to pass. Hours of intense darkness and awful solitude. Now and then strange sounds, the whoops of birds and the cries of animals, were borne down to me. Once I put my hand down to support myself a little on the hard ground, and some clammy thing wriggled from under it. I suppose it was a lizard; but my first thought at the time was of a poisonous snake.

"A long time after this I heard a bark quite near. I thought it was my husband, tracking me perhaps with a dog, and I called out as loud as I could. As I did so, twenty or thirty different barks, answering I suppose the first one, sounded on the cliff above me, and presently some stones fell down from above. I wondered what it could be. I did not know if there were wolves or wild dogs in the country, but I thought perhaps it was a pack roaming about for food. Suppose they discovered me. I kept as still as possible, scarcely daring to breathe. Then, after a little

while, some more stones and gravel fell from above. A stone must have struck Liza; she woke, and, frightened at finding herself in the dark, began to cry. Then at once arose a chorus of barks and grunts, and I heard scrambling noises on the mountain side. I expected every moment to see a pack of wolves rushing upon us. I pictured to myself their glaring eyes and gleaming white teeth, and I remembered accounts I had read of people being overtaken by wolves in Russia. I could see distinctly a picture I had seen of a woman in a sleigh, dropping her baby out at the back, to delay the wolves and give her a chance of escape. I got up and tried to climb up a thorny bush; but it was too small to bear our weight, and I only tore myself with the long, sharp thorns. But I could put Liza in it, and I did, reaching up as high as I could to place her in a fork, and tying her to the stem with my handkerchief. You've no idea how difficult I found it to do this in the dark.

"I had hardly finished when I heard some more scrambling, and over the top of a rock, which stood out against the sky, I saw what seemed to be the head and shoulders of a

man covered with hair looking at me with eyes that shone with a greenish-yellow light. I was so startled I gave one loud scream, when, oh! joy, I heard two fearful yells and then a voice crying, 'Mary,' from the mountain side lower down. I put my hands to my mouth and called as loud as I could, and again came the answer. It was my husband. The hairy man did not seem to like the noise I made; he grunted once or twice, and then disappeared behind the rock. I waited, trembling, thinking he was perhaps creeping along to seize me. But presently I heard voices and the noise of people walking on the opposite side of the ravine. I called out—'Here, Tom.' He came hurrying down over the rocks in a headlong way, and the next moment I was in his arms. In a moment he thought of Liza, but I smiled at him to let him know she was safe, for I couldn't speak, and I showed him her in the bush. Poor little thing, how frightened and scratched she was!

"Tom had his Kaffir boy with him, the same who is with us now. He soon collected some dry sticks, and we lit a fire. It was impossible for me to walk back in the dark,

and the ground was too rough for Tom to carry me, so we sat down to wait for daylight. It was not long in coming, and as soon as it was light we went back to the waggon. Tom said we had wandered quite five miles from it."

"And what did the hairy man turn out to be?" I asked.

"Oh, it was a baboon. It was their barking I had heard. It seems there was a troop of them on the hill-side."

"Yes," said Carey, "it was their barking that helped us to find her. U'mpisi and I had passed two-thirds of the night wandering up the kloof and about the spurs of the Bushman's Berg, shouting ourselves hoarse, and had nearly given up all hope of finding them till next morning, when U'mpisi's quick ears caught some distant sound. He crept on to the top of a ridge, and lay flat on the ground to listen. Then he said it was baboons barking, and that he thought, from the noise they were making, that they had discovered something and were signalling to each other. You can imagine how I rushed off in that direction, for I thought that if they had discovered Mary and Liza, they might attack them. You

never can tell what baboons will do, and sometimes they are so savage. We hurried along, up hill-sides, over rocks and stones, and down again into kloofs choked with thorn bush, sometimes tripping over unseen rocks or tumbling down steep banks that we hadn't noticed in the darkness, until, from a ravine below us, and not far off, suddenly rose a scream. We yelled back to scare the baboons, if they were interfering, and ran on. You know the rest."

"And what account had Liza to give of herself?"

"She said that when her mother was asleep, she got tired of playing with her doll, and climbed out of the waggon. Then she saw the yellow flowers of the acacias down by the river, and ran to pick some. While she was playing about there, she said a little gray bird came and fluttered quite close to her, and then sang and twittered and sat on a twig near by. It seemed so tame she tried to catch it; when it flew off a little way, and twittered again, looking back at her. She said she thought it was calling her to play with it, and she followed it along till she had gone a great way and was very

tired. Then she lost her shoe, and the stones hurt her foot; so she sat down and cried till she fell asleep. I've no doubt she followed a honey-bird. Those birds, you know, always try to attract one's attention by chirping and chattering in an excited way, and then lead you to the wild-bees' nest, flying on a little way at a time, and then stopping and looking back to see if they are followed. It's just the thing to lead a child away."

THE END.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS, CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.